

THE RESURRECTION: A STUDY IN THE HISTORY OF PREACHING

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by

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But I have lived, and have not lived in vain:
My mind may lose its force, my blood its fire,
And my frame perish even in conquering pain;
But there is that within me which shall tire
Torture and Time,
And breathe when I expire . . .

George Gordon (Lord Byron)
(1788-1824)

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation addresses the question of what happened to the tradition concerning the Resurrection of Jesus Christ as it was received and transmitted by the Apostle Paul in I Cor.15:3-5. Moreover, this paper also examines ideas concerning Paul's defense of the resurrection of the dead in the same portion of Scripture. The method is to examine the sermons of five representatives of the history of preaching to determine what use homiletically speaking has been made of the kerygma of Resurrection. Sermons are the data of the preaching experience. They reveal through form and content the presuppositions of the preacher and thereby reveal his interpretive mode. This paper is an attempt to understand the history of Christian interpretation by analyzing how a particular theme was treated by five historical figures in various times and places. The five preachers are John Chrysostom (345-407), Bernard of Clairvaux (1091?-1153), Martin Luther (1493-1546), John Wesley (1703-1791), and F. W. Robertson (1816-1853).

Following the introductory chapter, I Cor.15 is translated and analyzed in some detail. Successive chapters deal with the thought of each preacher, with a concluding chapter to round out the study. Certain historical conclusions arise out of the discussion. First, the homiletic method of each representative was apologetic in scope, as each one attempted to respond intelligently and persuasively to his intellectual and cultural context. Each preacher saw as his task the defense of the orthodox position of the church universal, that Christ died and was buried and was raised from the dead. In addition, each preacher argued for resurrection from the dead into life eternal in

some kind of recognizable form. The second conclusion pertains to the problem of translating an essentially Hebraic idea into terms which were comprehensible to and persuasive of the Greek mind. Neoplatonism was the vehicle that carried the kerygma into the Greco-Roman world, and we can see remnants of the gnostic mood throughout the history of preaching on the Resurrection. The tension that was felt between the ideas of immortality of the soul and resurrection of the dead was resolved for the most part by postulating two forms of life after death, an interim state following the separation of the soul from the body and the reunification of the soul with a body of restored flesh at the moment of resurrection. All of the preachers who are studied also felt the tension which exists between eschatology and history, so they spoke of resurrection generally as a presently realizable state of existence (historical reality) and as a future reality at the end of history. Moreover, all our subjects preached the new life which is yet to be as realizable in the ongoing life of the community of faith. Finally, most of our preachers recognized that suffering and death are a problem to be solved. Whenever the question cropped up concerning how a good and just and loving God could allow such a plenitude of evil to exist, the answer was to point to the Cross and Resurrection of Christ and God's promise of life in the midst of death and eternal life in recognizable form after death.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation addresses one central question: What happened in the history of preaching to the tradition concerning the Resurrection of Jesus Christ as it was received and transmitted by the Apostle Paul in I Corinthians 15? To wit:

For I handed down to you as first and foremost, which I too received, that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised from the dead according to the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.

To get at the subject matter, relevant sermons of five preeminent personalities in Christian preaching are examined in detail. The five preachers, and the ages of history to which they belong, are John Chrysostom (the Patristic Age), Bernard of Clairvaux (the Middle Ages), Martin Luther (the Reformation), John Wesley (the Great Awakening), and F. W. Robertson of Brighton (the Scientific Age). The reason for choosing these five figures is, first of all, that the literature on the history of preaching is unanimous in its positive evaluation of the contribution of each one to proclamation in history,¹ and second, that each one preached on the Resurrection.²

The paper also examines ideas concerning Paul's defense of the resurrection of the dead² from the viewpoint of the five preachers in

¹See, for example, Yngve Brilioth, A Brief History of Preaching (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965), and E. C. Dargan, A History of Preaching (New York: Armstrong, 1905; Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1954).

²All references to the Resurrection of Christ are designated by capitalizing the word. References to the resurrection of the dead employ the lower case.

question. It is clear that the people in the church at Corinth were concerned about many issues, not the least of which was the issue of life, death, and immortality, just as the church at Thessalonica had been so concerned (cf. I Thessalonians 4: 13). Paul had to address this concern in light of the delay of the Parousia, which raised implicitly the question of when Christ would return and translate the faithful into heaven. Paul chose to defend the Indo-Iranian doctrine of the resurrection of the dead, a teaching which was absorbed by Judaism during its Hellenistic phase. His answer to those who attached this doctrine (I Corinthians 15: 12b is the nub of his opponents' argument) was to argue from the Resurrection of Christ. Since Christ has been raised from the dead, those who make up his body on earth will also be raised from the dead at the end of this present age.

Paul put his own reputation and the witness of the apostles on the line by asserting that the only interpretation of life after death which could be given serious consideration was to be cast in apocalyptic terms. He argued vehemently against the dualistic Greco-Roman view, that death meant release of the soul from its body/prison. He argued instead in favor of the resurrection of the body. For Paul, if not for Judaism in general, this meant the transformation of the physical into a glorious, immortal, 'pneumatical' reality. It could be said, therefore, that Paul rejected both the Greek and the Hebrew views of immortality, since the Jews evidently thought of resurrection as restoration of the dead to their former physical selves.

Although the question of the immortality of the soul was not raised explicitly by his Greek opponents, one may assume that it was

never out of their mind. In a sense Paul was urging them to accept the fundamental unity of the person, a unity of mind and body and soul. By that light the human being is one, which means in this case that the body is not a prison in which the immortal soul is held against its will. Death is not release, therefore, but the enemy, the cosmic destroyer. The only hope for those who have died "in Christ" is a divine act of power, like that which raised Jesus from the dead and transformed him into a heavenly being. In short, Paul rejected the substantialist doctrine of the body/soul anthropology and reinterpreted immortality in terms of Jewish apocalypticism which he reshaped to fit his own understanding of life after death.

Since Paul had indeed staked his own apostolic reputation on the certainty of bodily resurrection, then surely this did not go unnoticed by subsequent generations of Christian preachers. As a model preacher, Paul has been emulated throughout the history of the church. What did the preachers of the church, as revealed by the sermons of five interpreters of faith, make of Paul's understanding of the Resurrection of Christ and of the resurrection of the dead? That is the question this dissertation attempts to answer.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND OUTLINE OF CONTENTS

The paper is outlined as follows. First of all, I Corinthians 15 is translated and analyzed in some detail. While this particular portion of Scripture is of primary interest, sermons on other texts, e.g., the Resurrection accounts in the Gospels, are also examined where it is deemed appropriate. Successive chapters deal with each of the five preachers. A concluding chapter rounds out the study.

Paul's Defense

In order for us to appreciate fully the impact of Paul's argument in I Corinthians 15, it is necessary to provide a faithful translation and careful analysis of it in Chapter 2, which is entitled "Paul's Defense of the Resurrection of the Dead." The title points to what may be the genre of the argument, that it belongs to the area of Christian apologetics. Paul was defending what he taught and was thereby implicitly defending himself. What was at stake here was not simply the question of the truth of a creedal tradition but the veracity and authority of the apostle himself.

Paul's argument rested on a tripod of authority. One leg was the received version of the Resurrection of Jesus, the most authoritative tradition of the primitive church. The second was the authority of those disciples of Jesus who experienced the risen Christ in terms of some kind of Christophanic event, that Jesus allowed himself to be seen by certain disciples. Finally, there was the experience of Paul himself, an admitted "Johnny-come-lately" who formerly persecuted the church. Paul erected his defense on this foundation. With Paul's argument firmly in mind, it then becomes possible to develop a view of Resurrection and resurrection in the preaching of the five historical figures.

John Chrysostom (345-407 A.D.)

Historical Background. Latourette has chronicled the sketchy but significant details of the first five hundred years of the history of the church in terms of the "sweep of Christianity across the

Greco-Roman world."³ The story he tells is a remarkable account of religious expansion, from Palestine north into southwest Asia, south into north Africa, and as far west as Spain, France and Great Britain. John Chrysostom was living at a time when the early expansion of Christianity had reached its highest point. With Constantine's edict of toleration in 313 and its subsequent legitimation under his three sons, the survival of Christianity was assured. Emperor Constantius, Constantine's third son, completed the process of making Christianity the religion of the state by closing pagan temples and forbidding certain pagan rites.

The legitimation of Christianity did not end its rivalry with competing faiths, however. Having survived the occasional storms of persecution by the state, especially in the second and third centuries, in the fourth century Christianity was nevertheless neck and neck with other forms of religious and philosophical expression in its attempt to win the heart and mind of the civilized world. Latourette mentions two. The first was Neoplatonism, a surviving religious philosophy of the ancient Greeks, in particular that of Plato himself, via gnosticism. One may recall that the origin of allegorical exegesis by way of Philo the Jew, and Clement of Alexandria and Origen, and thus its impact on Christian theology, may be related to this same stream of thought. Of Neoplatonism, Latourette says that it

left a permanent impress upon Christianity, partly through Augustine of Hippo, partly through its share in shaping Christian thought in general, and especially in its contributions to Christian mysticism.⁴

³Kenneth Scott Latourette, A History of Christianity (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1953), 65.

⁴Ibid., 94.

John Chrysostom was a product of that mystical mood whose roots are buried in the sands of ancient Egypt, where mystical theology and the rise of the contemplative schools of monasticism had their beginnings.

The second religious trend met by Christianity was the Persian doctrine of Mani, a dialectical faith which originally found expression in the teachings of Zoroaster, especially in terms of his ethical dualism. In the West St. Augustine came under the influence of both Neoplatonism and Manicheism. The homilies of his contemporary John Chrysostom demonstrate that the competition between Manicheism and Christianity was felt also in Constantinople, the eastern center of the Christian faith and the home of the Roman Empire. Chrysostom made several references to Manicheism as a divisive heresy and pointedly repudiated its basic thrust, especially as it concerned Christ's death and Resurrection.

In general the fourth century is noteworthy for several major developments in ecclesiastical life, which can only be given in outline form here. The increasing toleration of Christianity by the Roman Empire meant first of all that there was a shift from private to public worship. This was an era of cathedral building. The church building may symbolize the taking account of time, i.e., the recognition that the church was here to stay. During persecution there was of necessity private and domestic worship in the house churches. Toleration changed all that. At this time there was a move toward uniformity in worship, the solidification of the liturgical traditions in the form of written liturgies (see, for example, "The Liturgy of St. Chrysostom"), elaborate

public ceremony, the wearing of ecclesiastical vestments, and differentiation in the function of ministerial offices as the bishop began to serve as an administrator and the elder as celebrant.

As private worship went public, public confession and absolution went private in the form of the confessional. This may be indicative of a slackening in church discipline, a question already raised by the controversy surrounding Cyprian and the Novatians in the mid-third century and later on by the Donatists. The whole question of post-baptismal sin and sanctification vis a vis pastoral concern for those who did not measure up to the harsh standards of certain portions of the New Testament (see, e.g., Hebrews 6), which give little hope for apostates, was restated in the fourth century as a concern for the efficacy of the sacraments, especially the eucharist and penance. This was also the period when a heightened sense of awe and mystery surrounding the elementa sacra, a result of the mystical theological bent mentioned above, was enhanced by the increasing power of the clergy to mediate salvation by the granting or withholding of the Sacrament.

Finally, one may mention the shift from an eschatological to a historical point of view, a shift in Christian theology which was alluded to above. In fourth century theology and worship the eschatological tension was still felt, but the End had moved far into the background, a tendency seen interestingly enough already in the New Testament, especially in the theology of Luke/Acts. Along with this shift of emphasis we see the development of the church year and a heightened sense of sacred time and sacred place as "heaven" became less an eschatological concept and more a present reality in the

on-going life of the church as a historical phenomenon. John Chrysostom, deacon, liturgist, bishop, and preacher extraordinaire, was a product of this exciting and revolutionary period of church history.

Synopsis of Chapter. Chapter 3 is entitled "John Chrysostom: Pastor and Preacher," following the title of the book by Donald Attwater. In this chapter we examine the thought and teaching of the fragile Bishop John, called "Golden Mouth." Here was the mind of a Greek rhetorician at work interpreting the history of the Resurrection. Here was a liturgical mind who celebrated the real presence of the risen Christ in the food of the Eucharist. This chapter examines his assumptions and attitudes, his hermeneutic if you will, as they are revealed by his treatment of the Resurrection in the gospels according to Matthew and John, in his homilies on the book of Hebrews, and finally in I Corinthians itself. Special attention is paid to how I Corinthians 15 affected Chrysostom's preaching in terms of his hermeneutic. That is to say, how did Paul's summary of the kerygma affect Chrysostom's view of the preaching of the gospels? Was Paul's description of the resurrection body evident in his understanding of what happened to Jesus? How did the preacher handle the problem of the shame of the Cross?

It will be seen that for Chrysostom the Resurrection was a symbol of Christ's power. Jesus Christ, as God incarnate, was omnipotent. Those who believe in Christ and align themselves with Christ in sacred fellowship and love are empowered to overcome the world. It is not stretching the truth of the matter to say that for Chrysostom the resurrection of the dead was symbolic of the power of the risen Christ

who resides in his immortal Body on earth, the church as a community of salvation and eternal life. That is to say, Chrysostom believed that the power of the risen Christ is present in the community of faith, even as it was present in the preaching of the apostles. As we shall see, this empowerment was the only way he could understand how a small band of unlearned laborers had persuaded the Greek mind of the truth of Christianity. That fact, that the apostles did so persuade the Greco-Roman world, and the present existence of the church in all parts of the civilized world, were proof positive in Chrysostom's mind of the truth of the Resurrection of Christ.

Bernard of Clairvaux (1091?-1153)

Historical Background. According to the historical literature, Christianity suffered a decline between the years 500 and 1100. Marty, however, calls the end of that period neither dark nor aged.⁵ Nevertheless, there is something to be said for the view that the classical monastic period of the twelfth century represents a powerful movement of reform and revival. Monasticism was a direct reaction to clerical abuses and the secularization of Christianity. But by the tenth century monasticism itself lay practically in ruins, a victim of outside invasion (the forces of Islam et al.) and internal corruption (e.g., profit making by secular princes). The story of monasticism in the Middle Ages, from the Cluniac reform movement to the Cistercian revival, is about the

⁵Martin E. Marty, A Short History of Christianity (New York: New American Library, 1959), 97.

"movement to free monasteries from all local secular ecclesiastical interference and to ensure them liberty to pursue the full Christian life" ⁶

The founder of the Cistercian movement was the Benedictine monk Robert, who was a product of the Cluny family of monastic communities which in time included the Franciscans, Dominicans and Jesuits. Latourette tells us that the Cistercians differed from their predecessors in at least five ways. ⁷ First, they wore white habits in contradistinction to the traditional black. Second, they attempted really to observe the vow of poverty. This meant the elimination of elaborate and expensive accoutrements of worship and communal simplicity. Third, the Cistercians were isolated geographically, with the monks themselves doing manual labor in the fields and vineyards. Fourth, they reduced the time spent in public worship and emphasized instead private prayer and devotion to enhance their sense of divine vocation. Finally, the houses of Citeaux were an integrated order, with common rules of worship and behavior. Latourette does not mention another distinctive characteristic of the monks of the Cistercian order, their consummate winemaking ability.

Bernard of Clairvaux, who preached the Second Crusade as part of the church's longstanding fantasy of retaking the Holy Land from the forces of Islam, was the great popularizer of the Cistercian movement. His part in moving the church towards another albeit abortive Crusade, thereby attempting to perpetuate the myth of ecclesiastical righteousness vis a vis the infidel, is powerful testimony to his persuasive

⁶ Latourette, 422.

⁷ Ibid., 423-424.

eloquence as an orator and preacher. A rival of Abelard in terms of what Bernard saw as his duty to defend his own perception of orthodoxy, he "was the most influential individual in the religious life of Western Europe of his generation."⁸

Synopsis of Chapter. The title of Chapter 4 is "Bernard of Clairvaux: Doctor of Love." It is well known that Bernard's central affirmation concerned the perfection of divine love in the soul of the believer. As Walsh states in his introduction to Bernard's homilies on the Song of Solomon, according to Bernard, "Charity draws all back to unity. By loving God and all things for his sake, the soul becomes one spirit with him, so perfect is its likeness to him."⁹

Bernard's spiritual program, therefore, was to direct human love, i.e., love of self and love of things, back to God, in order to restore the divine image and likeness. As we shall see, at the heart of this program was the power of the Resurrection which draws one up to the highest degree of love, when one does not love even oneself except for the love of God. Bernard believed that this level, which is the ultimate goal of human perfection, will come at the moment of the transformation of the living and the dead, which is the 'mystery' of the resurrection in I Corinthians 15:51 ff. In Bernard's thought transformation was tantamount to perfection as divine consummation, the final restoration of the imago dei.

⁸ Ibid., 424.

⁹ Kilian Walsh, "Introduction" in Bernard of Clairvaux, St. Bernard on the Song of Songs (Spencer, MA: Cistercian, 1971), xxxix.

Four primary works in English provided the bulk of the sermonic material covered by our study of Bernard. They are G. B. Burch's translation of De gradibus humilitatis, two translations of De diligendo deo, by T. L. Connolly and Hugh Martin, and Bernard's homilies on the Song of Solomon, which was cited above. It is realized that De gradibus humilitatis and De diligendo deo are not strictly speaking homiletical material, but instead are theological writings in the form of instruction to monastic communities modelled after the Benedictine Rule. They were included in the study by virtue of their homiletical and devotional mood.

Bernard is known for his incarnational preaching: Jesus is the model and norm of Christian proclamation. Divine power and human persuasion flow together in his sermons to produce a synthesis of divine/human encounter. His sermons are especially noteworthy for their mystical contemplation of the humanity of Christ. He is therefore indebted to Augustine, who said that contemplation of the humanity of Jesus, especially his Passion, is the way to experience the living Christ.

Martin Luther (1493-1546)

Historical Background. At the beginning of the sixteenth century the church stood face to face with an entirely new political and cultural situation, which can be summarized in one word: nationalism. Gone forever were the days of absolute ecclesiastical control over the princes of this world. The high Middle Ages saw the decline of papal power, no doubt due in part to the failure of the Crusades, and the beginning of a new world order. The Ottoman Turks, under the banner of

Islam, had increased their empire by adding more and more territory in the name of religious conversion, a phenomenon not unknown to other world religions. The Renaissance and its great companion Humanism were in full flower. A more democratic spirit stirred in society, accompanied by a decline in ecclesiastical power and clerical authority. Martin Luther's defiant act of October 31, 1517, the birthday of the Protestant Reformation, came in the fullness of those revolutionary times.

It is well-known that Luther's foremost objection in the Ninety-Five Theses was the sale of indulgences. The Middle Ages are somewhat notorious for the itinerant preacher who went from village to town peddling salvation. Historically, the indulgence itself had a special place in the church's economy of salvation. The treasury of Christ and his saints, which was of infinite merit, was at the disposal of the church. The bishop, it was believed, had the power to transfer merit from a saint to a needy soul in order to gain satisfaction for that soul. The indulgence had to do with the penalty which satisfaction required, such as fasting or pilgrimage. If the sinner died with an outstanding debt (incomplete satisfaction), then the bishop could transfer merit from the heavenly treasury to a soul in purgatory and thus hasten the soul's ascent to heaven. This may partially account for the ability of the church to raise armies for the Crusades, since it was held that participation in a crusade meant plenary indulgence. If a soldier died in battle, satisfaction was complete and the crusader went straight to heaven. Apparently people were willing to pay for such a service, and by the time of Luther the sale of indulgences surpassed all other means of fundraising.

When Luther's attack on ecclesiastical abuses, which was originally printed in Latin, was translated into the vernacular and distributed among the people, it created a furor which surprised even Luther himself. By the time the storm had died down, the Reformation was well under way. The church had moved too little and too late to stop it. The 'wild boar' of Pope Leo X had already torn the vineyard apart.¹⁰ The pope rightly assessed the problem: Luther had attacked the church's 'interpretation of Scripture.' Christendom would never be the same, in fact had already ceased to exist.

Synopsis of Chapter. We turn now to the Reformation in the person of Martin Luther; Chapter 5 is called "Martin Luther: Defender of the Faith." Between August 11, 1532, and April 27, 1533, Luther preached a remarkable series of seventeen sermons on I Corinthians 15. These appear as a commentary in Luther's Works. This detailed work is not, as the editor believes, "a series of sermons on the Christian view of death."¹¹ It belongs instead to the genre of Christian apologetics. Like Paul before him, Luther preached in defense of a creedal affirmation, specifically the article "I believe in the resurrection of the dead." Luther evidently believed that his entire program of preaching justification by grace through faith in Jesus Christ stood on that one article. In these sermons he seemed to be saying that if that article

¹⁰Cf. Marty, 227.

¹¹Hilton C. Oswald (ed.) in Martin Luther, Commentaries on I Corinthians 7, I Corinthians 15, Lectures on I Timothy (St. Louis: Concordia, 1973), x.

of faith is overthrown, then Christian preaching is meaningless and the Christian faith is in vain. This was skating on very thin ice.

Again like Paul Luther was defending himself. Not only was he acting as a self-appointed defender of orthodoxy, but he felt constrained to defend his own authority as a messenger from God. There he was, outside the arms of Mother Church, with no credentials, no external authority, with only a firm belief in the Bible to guide him. Perhaps that is why he had to defend himself and his followers in the name of defending the truth of Christianity. Martin Luther was a preacher without portfolio.

John Wesley (1703-1791)

Historical Background. Latourette has characterized the period between 1500 and 1750 as a time which saw "the resumption of the worldwide spread of Christianity."¹² Territory was lost between 1350 and 1500, but by the mid-eighteenth century Christianity inhabited all five continents, a situation due in great part to the work of Catholic missionaries. It is no coincidence that this was also the period of rapid European expansion. Religious and military incursions were made into Africa, the Orient, and the New World, the latter as a result primarily of the Spanish Conquistadores. Among the English speaking colonies in America Protestantism was prominent, whereas among the Spanish and French, it was Catholicism.

¹²Latourette, 923.

John Wesley was born during an era that has been called the Enlightenment. The roots of this age of reason, along with its religious companion Deism, lie perhaps in the Humanism of Erasmus (1469?-1536), and its popularity must be attributed to the writings of the French philosopher Voltaire (1694-1778), an avowed enemy of Christianity who once said, "If God did not exist, he would have to be invented." In conjunction with the skeptical philosophy of the Scot David Hume (1711-1776), himself an intellectual descendent of the seventeenth century philosopher John Locke (1632-1704), the skepticism of Voltaire presented a serious challenge to traditional Christian faith and practice. The main emphasis during this period not surprisingly was on the human mind and the power of the intellect to solve human problems. God's role in creation had been reduced to that of cosmic clockmaker who wound the universe up and left it to run by itself under the control of natural laws such as gravity and the laws of motion. Occasionally God was needed to fill in the gaps of human knowledge and to do emergency repair work, but for the most part God was an unnecessary hypothesis.

In biblical interpretation this meant there was a deemphasis on the miracles of Christ and a serious attempt to present the Bible as reasonable, a task that is reminiscent of practically every other age of Christian interpretation, not to mention the time of the Jewish apologete Philo in first century Alexandria. At the same time one may observe in worship and ecclesiastical life an increasing tendency toward liturgical uniformity, a move towards the separation of church and state, a further decline in ecclesiastical control over the human

mind, an increasing emphasis on various forms of private piety to promote the inner life, and a decrease in the authority of the clergy. It was an age of increasing secularism.

This emphasis on reason was by no means new to Christianity, since some of the greatest thinkers of the church, e.g., Augustine, had emphasized the rationality of humankind. Furthermore, historically the defense of Christian thought may be seen as an attempt to promote Christian knowledge as more reasonable than prevailing counter-opinions. Nevertheless, rationalism presented a serious threat to the central teachings of the Christian faith, not the least of which was the doctrine of divine intervention in the form of the Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, an affirmation which was not only a stumbling block in this era but in every other period of Christian existence, including the "golden age" of the apostles.

Viewed against the background of the Enlightenment, the eighteenth century evangelical revival in English and American Protestantism was a remarkable phenomenon. In America Jonathan Edwards, the last of a long line of Puritans, confessed surprise at the number of conversions which seemed to light up the whole countryside surrounding Northampton in the Berkshires of western Massachusetts. It is difficult to say where the Great (or Evangelical) Awakening began or why, but it is historical fact that Edwards' "A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God in the Conversion of Many Hundred Souls in Northampton" enjoyed wide circulation in Great Britain. In England John Wesley, who was influenced both by the Moravians and by Edwards' description of the revival in New England, was the foremost "leader

and creator of the Evangelical movement . . ."¹³ Along with George Whitefield, he played a singular role in the establishment of an evangelical reality which may be seen in part as a direct response to the Enlightenment and its rationalistic mood. By stressing the necessity of rebirth and conversion, the authority of the Bible, and justification by faith alone, Wesleyan revivalism was a kind of 'neo-orthodoxy' long before Karl Barth was a gleam in his father's eye. The teaching of Paul, as outlined by Martin Luther, had come home once again, and it was here to stay.

Synopsis of Chapter. The sixth chapter of our study is called "John Wesley: Homo Unius Libri." It is certainly not inappropriate that discussion of Wesley should follow the one on Luther. Wesley related in his Journal that in May of 1738 he went unwillingly to a society meeting in a house on Aldersgate Street in London where someone was reading Luther's Preface to the Epistle to the Romans. It was at this meeting that he felt his heart strangely warmed. Wesley became convinced of his own salvation that night, and his preaching evidences a serious and devout evangelism which is still heartwarming.

Wesley recognized that life is transitory. As he said in the preface to his first series of sermons:

I have thought, I am a creature of a day, passing through life as an arrow through the air. I am a spirit come from God, and

¹³Ibid., 1023.

returning to God: Just hovering over the great gulf; I drop into an unchangeable eternity.¹⁴

Like F. W. Robertson, what really counted for Wesley was eternity. He believed that this world is impermanent, changing, uncertain. Only heaven is eternal. Only God can be trusted. That is why it may be said that Wesley's preaching project was concerned with immortality. He himself observed that he has set down in his sermons "what I find in the Bible concerning the way to heaven . . ."¹⁵

At the heart of Wesley's preaching the way to heaven was his gospel of perfection as love of God and neighbor and self. Wesley's teaching on perfection or sanctification, what he called 'gospel holiness,' was much misunderstood in his day, as his defense of it across a span of more than thirty years demonstrates. It is, however, beautiful in its simplicity. In essence he said that perfect love is the love of God for the true believer. According to Wesley, this was the place where preaching begins. In the Preface to the second series of sermons, for example, he advised the Christian preacher to imitate the style of I John, which is the most excellent style for every preacher of the gospel. He went on to say:

Only let his language be plain, proper, and clear, and it is enough.
 . . And let him aim at no more ornament than he finds in that sentence,

¹⁴John Wesley, The Works of John Wesley (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1958), V, 3.

¹⁵Ibid., VI, 4.

which is the sum of the whole gospel, 'We love Him, because He first loved us.'¹⁶

This sentence is a paraphrase of I John 4:19. Now the main idea of the fourth chapter of I John is that "if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us." (vs.12) For Wesley, then, the appropriate response to God's love was love. This means that when one loves one manifests in one's act of loving the invisible God. Love is a sign of God's presence. Love is perfected in the believer by the abiding presence of God who leads one from life in the midst of death to eternal life after death.

Like Bernard before him, Wesley viewed final perfection as a divine act of transformation whereby the believer is "recreated" in the image of God by the love of God. Without going into the full argument here, an analysis of Wesley's thought reveals that he too believed that final perfection as restoration of the divine image will come only at the time of the resurrection of the dead, when death itself will be swallowed up in victory.

F. W. Robertson (1816-1853)

Historical Background. The nineteenth century, whose terminus a quo is the War of 1812 and whose terminus ad quem is World War I, saw a continuation of the vitiation of the Christian worldview. It was a period of great intellectual ferment, with the rise of the movements

¹⁶Ibid., VI, 187.

which bear the names of Charles Darwin (1809-1882), Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), to name three of the most famous creators of modern thought. By the end of the century, which died in the gas-filled trenches of Europe during the war which was to save the world for democracy once and for all, a worldview had been transformed. The evolutionary process had at long last become aware of itself.

In the church itself, in Germany, exegetes like Baur (1792-1886) and Wellhausen (1844-1918), and theologians like Schleiermacher (1768-1835) and Ritschl (1822-1884), were systematically challenging the dogmatic assertions of orthodox Protestant theology and interpretation. It was a period of great complexity and vitality, mixed with a growing spirit of ecumenism among Protestants in continental Europe, Great Britain and America.

In England the established church, though not healthy, was sleek and well-fed. A victim of class consciousness and a predilection for the wealthy, the church nevertheless contained the seeds of a reform movement in the party of the Evangelicals who had remained within the Anglican communion following the great success of Methodism as a separate ecclesiastical and theological movement. In addition to the Evangelical revival, one may make mention of the Oxford movement, which in part is attributable to the preaching of John Henry Newman (1801-1890) while he was vicar of St. Mary's church in Oxford. Many adherents of the Oxford or Tractarian movement, which preached Anglicanism as the via media between Catholicism and Evangelicalism, followed Newman's example and joined the Roman Catholic Church. This merely intensified opposition

to the burgeoning Anglo-Catholicism which was hiding in the Oxford Movement and increased tensions within an already troubled ecclesiastical situation.

F. W. Robertson has been called one of the greatest preachers in the history of English preaching. Even though he was educated at Oxford and demonstrated in his sermons an affinity for the incipient Anglo-Catholicism of the movement which bears that university's name (cf. his view of the Virgin Mary), nevertheless he was influenced more by the Evangelical party. In fact, as a biographer points out, he refused to join the Oxford party despite the strong impression one of Newman's sermons on baptism had made on him.¹⁷ Instead, Robertson felt moved to refute systematically those doctrines, especially the teaching of Newman, which seemed to Robertson to deviate from the teachings of the apostles. This activity was to occupy a great deal of his time while a ministerial candidate at the University in Oxford.

Synopsis of Chapter. Our final subject is the preaching of Frederick William Robertson of Brighton, England. Chapter 7 is called "F. W. Robertson: Searcher After Truth." The motivating center of Robertson's preaching was the search for truth or what is real. Truth, he said, resides in the perfect human being, Jesus the Son of Man. According to Robertson, truth is rarely abstract, but comes in human form. Jesus, the divine human, was reality incarnate. To believe in the truth

¹⁷F. W. Robertson, Life and Letters of F. W. Robertson (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1870), 34-35.

of one's own resurrection as 'immortality in some form,' then, was to believe in the 'world-fact' of the Resurrection of Jesus.

What was the truth revealed by the Resurrection according to Robertson? It was the promise of eternity which resists decay and death. It was the assurance that in this life the faithful have Christ who abides in them as a life-giving spirit of immortality which belies the story of the seemingly endless natural cycle of birth and decay and death. Something remarkable has happened, Robertson said, and that is the reality of Christ who was God on earth in human form. Through Christ all of creation has been redeemed. For Robertson the meaning of the Resurrection was that the transitoriness of life has been set aside in the face of the reality of the permanence of eternity. Robertson was assured of immortality as personal identity by the truth of the immortality of Christ.

Robertson taught that resurrection is perfection in that one's entire life is a being towards God by becoming like Christ. The resurrection of the dead, he believed, will complete the process of perfection which began in baptism. The resurrection represented for Robertson a finished condition or state of fulfillment which is analogous to the ancient ideas of apotheosis.

If this sounds familiar, it is because we see similar ideas throughout the history of preaching the Resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of the dead. It may be an elementary observation, but it is a truism that human beings read each other. This is especially true of theologians. That is why certain ideas and concepts which stimulate the imagination are stated and restated throughout the history of

Christian thought. They are absorbed into the stream of historical consciousness, only to crop up here and there, seemingly at random. But one can only assume, if it is not specifically stated, that those who evidence knowledge of these ideas have studied the past.

In the case of the Christian understanding of the resurrection of the dead, for example, one main idea has been inherited from the past. The resurrection will be God's way of restoring humanity and the rest of creation to its pristine state. It will be a kind of "re-creation" of a new and perfect world, a paradise without pain, disease or death. As we shall see, this vision is not wholly without contemporary relevance. It is not so heavenly minded that it is no earthly good. This vision of perfection through resurrection should and does affect life in this world. As a lure to fulfillment it is perhaps the one great motive for doing good here and now. The Christian way of life is a life of loving God and each other moment by moment. It is a process of being made perfect in love. The love of God is the sole purpose which affects Christian behavior in this present life. As the end of existence, love is at the same time the means of righteous living.

Robertson's sermons, which include those preached between August 15, 1847, and August 15, 1853, exist as reminiscences only. In the Preface to the original edition we learn that they were not written out before delivery, but they were

simply 'Recollections': sometimes dictated by the Preacher himself to the younger members of a family in which he was interested, at their urgent entreaty; sometimes written out by himself for them when they were at a distance and unable to attend his ministry.¹⁸

¹⁸F. W. Robertson, Sermons Preached at Brighton (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1870), v.

Altogether there are four series in this volume for a total of ninety-three sermons. The fifth series appears in a volume containing thirty-two sermons published by his son, C. B. Robertson. In addition, Robertson also delivered a lecture series on First Corinthians. The lectures on I Corinthians 15 (XXVII-XXXI) will be discussed first, followed by an analysis of the sermons.

SCOPE AND METHOD OF INQUIRY

Scope

My aim is simple. It is to answer as carefully as possible the thesis question, which may be restated as a search for the meaning of the Resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of the dead as they were preached. What did these ideas communicate? How were they understood by five representatives of the history of preaching? One may be assured that our understanding of the history of Christian proclamation and interpretation will be increased by this study.

Furthermore, this dissertation is to a great extent a serious response to what may be one of the greatest problems of human existence, a dilemma which threatens the very meaning of life itself, and that is the reality of death and its grim companion suffering. Ernest Becker puts it this way:

. . . the idea of death, the fear of it, haunts the human animal like nothing else; it is a mainspring of human activity--activity designed largely to avoid the fatality of death, to overcome it by denying in some way that it is the final destiny for men.¹⁹

¹⁹Ernest Becker, The Denial of Death (New York: Free Press, 1973), ix.

One does not have to accept this thesis in its entirety to recognize that Becker has touched a sore spot. As the major premise of the old syllogism says, "All men are mortal." The Christian response to this problem is to deny death by affirming that through the Resurrection of Jesus Christ death has been overcome once and for all. The Christian denial of death, while not verifiable by the criteria of the empirical method, is nevertheless not escapist fantasy. It is based on the logic of faith which is a sure knowledge that through the Resurrection God initiated a life-giving process which will eventuate in ultimate victory over suffering and death. This vision of final perfection, when God will be 'all-in-all,' may point to the central meaning of the New Testament. The Resurrection of Christ and belief in life after death rob death of its power to destroy the meaning of life by stealing from death its primary weapon, the power of phobos. Fear of death, we may affirm, was annihilated on the Cross and was transformed by the Resurrection into an assurance that death has lost its power to hurt.

Method

By staying close to the central question of the inquiry and by reporting faithfully what is discovered, this approach is designed after the criteria of the empirical method. This methodology may be seen as a report of the facts pertaining to what is really there in the sermons to be examined, then the establishment of general principles which the evidence seems to beg one to conclude. That is to say, the method is that of analysis and synthesis. First of all, the extant sermons of the five representatives are analyzed. Sermons are the facts of the matter,

the "brute events" of the history of preaching. Sermons are the data of the preaching experience. One can argue about their relevance, validity, coherence, and truth, but they are events and they can be analyzed. Having examined these events in light of the central question of the inquiry, it then becomes possible to synthesize what is discovered by formulating certain conclusions which may prove helpful in establishing a basis for future study. In short, the method of the inquiry is both objective and subjective. It is objective insofar as it is an examination of real events and an attempt to find out what has been said about a subject of real importance. It is subjective in that the concluding comments are merely conjectural but informed opinions.

Finally, it must be said that this dissertation is not an end but a beginning. It is a prolegomenon. I say this because I am not attempting to deal with the whole of Christian preaching. I am trying to lay the foundations for what will be a full lifetime of study.

Chapter 2

PAUL'S DEFENSE OF THE RESURRECTION
OF THE DEAD

In this section we shall examine Paul's understanding of the resurrection in I Corinthians 15. What I want to do is to provide a literal translation which is faithful to the Greek text. In order to enhance our understanding of the thought, I also intend to make appropriate exegetical comments to clarify obscure ideas. With Paul's argument firmly in mind, it then becomes possible to address the preaching of our historical representatives in light of the central questions which were posed in Chapter 1.

I CORINTHIANS 15

I Corinthians 15 may be divided into four parts: the kerygma of the apostles (vv. 1-11); the refutation of the argument of Paul's opponents (vv. 12-34); the new creation (vv. 35-49); and the mystery of the resurrection (vv. 50-58). Part one, then, is a reminder of the tradition which Paul received and handed down to the church. Part two is a direct application of the kerygma to the situation at Corinth. Part three is Paul's interpretation of the resurrection of the dead. The final part relates his new teaching concerning the resurrection.

1. the Kerygma of the Apostles (vv. 1-11).

Translation. (1) Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel which I preached to you, which in fact you received, in which you also stand, (2) through which you are also saved, whose word I preached to you, if you hold fast, unless you became believers in vain. (3) For I handed down to you as first and foremost, what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the

scriptures, (4) and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures, (5) and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. (6) Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep. (7) Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. (8) But last of all, as if to an abortion, he appeared also to me. (9) For I am the least of the apostles, who is not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. (10) Yet by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace on my behalf was not in vain. But I worked harder than all of them, not I but the grace of God within me. (11) Whether, then, I or they, so we preach and so you believed.

Exegesis. This opening statement provides the foundation on which Paul will erect his subsequent argument against the thesis of his opponents. It is therefore a summation of a legal argument. Paul is reminding the Corinthians of their obligation to hold fast to the received tradition. When they became believers they contracted with Paul. What they agreed to do was not only a statement of faith but a legal contract, the originating "constitution" of the Corinthian church, to which they committed themselves actively and bound themselves legally.

Paul did not originate the kerygma. He too received it. As an apostle it was his duty and responsibility faithfully to transmit the word he had received. (If he received it from the church at Jerusalem, what is one to think of his disclaimers in Gal. 1:12 and 2:6?) It is apparent, however, that he was not content merely to reiterate the tradition. Using the kerygma as a foundation he goes on to erect his argument, whose chief thrust is to prove the resurrection of the dead. Therefore, Paul's argument here and throughout the chapter is less a polemic than an apologia. Paul is defending the resurrection of the dead.

That he is also defending his own apostolic authority and legitimacy may be self-evident, but it needs to be stated. Not only is he defending the kerygma, but he is also defending himself (cf. Galatians 1). This does not comprise the bulk of his argument, however, and will be mentioned only in passing.

Paul introduces the first section in the form of homiletical rhetoric (so Dodd¹). Paul is addressing the congregation as an apostolic preacher whose authority to speak is based on the appearance of Christ in verse 8. This is a historical reminder, really a 're-presentation' of the Corinthians' reception of the gospel, which calls to their attention their obligation to that gospel in its present effects and benefits. The word Paul preached was a saving word. As verse 2 implies, according to the apostles the received tradition or paradosis is the foundation of Christian existence. That saving word, however, is conditioned by the present commitment of those who embraced it. That is to say, the saving benefits of the act of proclamation in the past are contingent on holding fast to that same word in the present. There can be no deviation from the core of the gospel. Its mode of proclamation and its content are inseparable. To reject Paul's word is to reject the tradition and thus be in danger of having believed in vain. The aorist ἐΠΙΣΤΕΥΣΑΤΕ (vv. 2 and 11) indicates instantaneous or 'punctiliar' action which was binding on the Corinthians once and for all. To depart from the apostolic tradition now is to nullify the saving effects of the gospel then.

¹C. H. Dodd, The Apostolic Preaching (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 9-17.

Having reminded the Corinthians of their obligation to hold fast to the paradosis, Paul next sets out to make its content perfectly clear (vv. 3-7). The technical terms παράδοσις and παράληψις, which in rabbinic literature and the Greco-Roman mystery religions refer to the handing down and taking over of a tradition (παράδοσις), introduce the received tradition, which is inclusive of verses 3c through 5. The use of ἐτι indicates that what is to follow is a creedal or confessional statement. Verses 6-7 may be included as part of the kerygma. They are apparently later additions to the more primitive tradition of verse 3-5.

As it stands, the older section of the creed, whose provenance is likely to be the Aramaic speaking community in Jerusalem (with Jeremias,² against Conzelmann,³) consists of three major propositions: Christ died (v.3c); Christ was buried (v.4a); Christ was raised (v.4b). The modifying phrases of propositions one and three should be given equal structural weight. It is not the case that 'according to the scriptures' modifies both the first and second members of the two formulae, 'that Christ died/for our sins' and 'that he was raised/on the third day.' Here we have a mixture of history, 'metahistory,' and interpretation. The history is that he died and was buried, the metahistory

² Joachim Jeremias, The Eucharistic Words of Jesus (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966), 100ff.

³ Hans Conzelmann, "On the Analysis of the Confessional Formula in I Cor. 15:3-5," Interpretation, XX, 1 (January 1966), 18. Even Conzelmann equivocates by saying that Jerusalem is not to be excluded.

that he was raised. The interpretation is that he died for our sins according to the scriptures and that he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures. 'According to the scriptures' parallels 'for our sins' and 'on the third day.' This means that 'according to the scriptures' is an interpretive modification of the two primary statements 'that Christ died and that he was raised.'⁴ In the first instance the kerygma states that Christ died for our sins and that Christ died according to the scriptures. In the second instance we learn that he was raised on the third day and that he was raised according to the scriptures. In both instances we have coordinate phrases, really Christian interpretation, modifying ἀπέθικεν and ἐγήγερται. As to what scriptures are intended here, the phrase appears to be a general appeal to scriptural authority. Any attempt to quote chapter and verse (Isaiah 53 or Hosea 6:1-2, e.g.) misses that point.

Given the stature of both Peter and James the Just in the early church it is not surprising to find what seems to be a conflation of two traditions in the latter part of the apostolic tradition (vv. 5-7). Paul himself tells us in Galatians 1:18-19 that on his first journey to Jerusalem he went up to visit Cephas, seeing also James the brother of the Lord, who is listed among the apostles. James was apparently converted soon after the Resurrection. In Galatians 2:1-10, the account

⁴The way is pointed here in Bruce Metzger, "A Suggestion concerning the meaning of I Corinthians 15:4b," Journal of Theological Studies, VIII, 1 (April 1957), 121. However, he is less concerned about the interpretive implications of the modifying phrases than he is about their structural significance. It seems to me, however, that any analysis which does not take into consideration the meaning of Christian interpretation stops short of a thorough treatment of the apostolic preaching and its significance.

of the so called apostolic council some eleven years later, the order of names would indicate that a shift in apostolic power has taken place in the church at Jerusalem. Here we discover that James, the foremost pillar of the church, is now in charge. This is supported by Acts 15:19 which clearly shows James to be the voice of authority. Faced with these facts the church brought together those two traditions which aim at legitimizing the apostolates of Peter and James.

The use of ἐκ in verse 5 probably indicates that the Petrine tradition belonged to the original kerygma. With the ascendancy of James as head of the Jerusalem church a christophanic tradition arose which is analogous to a founder legend. Cultic legends of this sort were common in the ancient world. As to what the reference to δωδεκά may mean, Conzelmann says that they cannot be the twelve disciples of the gospels, but must mean a group that Peter gathered around him, "a circle of twelve representatives of the people of God."⁵ That is to say, Peter established the church. According to this account, however, Peter was understood to be the foundation of the church by virtue of a christophany. This version contradicts Matthew 16:18.

Paul's insistence here that Christ appeared also to him can only be understood if a christophanic experience (a "conversion" experience) was a prerequisite of apostleship. He recognizes that some question concerning his sincerity might well be raised by his opponents based on the fact that formerly he had persecuted the church. His humility and

⁵Conzelmann, 22.

sincerity are evident in this passage, since he compares his experience to an unnatural birth. This indicates that he recognized the monstrous claim he is making, that one who had been the church's chief antagonist should now be its most ardent protagonist. His opponents doubtless took great delight in bringing up his past in an attempt to embarrass him and discredit his apostolic authority. It may well be that he took over an epithet which had been applied to him by his enemies.

Paul follows the admission of his untimely birth by saying that it was God's grace working in him which brought legitimacy to his labor and enabled him to work harder than all of the rest of the apostles. He summarizes section one by implying that it does not really matter after all who worked harder. What counts is that they hold fast to the tradition which he and the others continue to transmit. That same word of salvation is still being preached by those who are still alive. The essential issue is that the Corinthians became believers for the sake of the gospel which is proclaimed by all and they are still under its obligation. In short, this passage is a reminder of the once and for all nature of belief in the gospel.

The implications for Christian preaching must not be lost. Paul's handling of the paradosis reminds us that the gospel, while rooted in history, is not intended to prove the Resurrection. Instead, it has to do with the personal existence of those who hear it and respond to its demands. In existentialist terms, the gospel as kerygma is experienced as a faith-awakening event which transforms one's very existence in terms of its demand for decision either for God (God raised Jesus from the dead) or the world (Dead men tell no tales). What I think is at stake here is

the very nature of reality itself. In the Crucified and Risen One we see the triumph of suffering love.

2. the Refutation of the Corinthian Thesis (vv.12-34).

Translation. (12) Now if Christ is preached that he has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? (13) If there is no resurrection of the dead, neither has Christ been raised. (14) But if Christ has not been raised, then our kerygma is empty, and your faith is empty, (15) and we are even found to be false witnesses of God, that we testified against God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if in fact the dead are not raised. (16) For if the dead are not raised, neither has Christ been raised. (17) And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is fruitless, you are still in your sins. (18) And furthermore, those who have fallen asleep in Christ have been utterly destroyed. (19) If in this life we who are in Christ have hope only, we are the most miserable of all human beings.

(20) Now in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. (21) For since death (is) through a man, so also the resurrection of the dead (is) through a man. (22) For just as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. (23) But each in turn: first Christ, then at his parousia those who belong to Christ. (24) Then the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler, and every ruling force and power. (25) For he must rule until he has put all enemies under his feet. (26) The last enemy to be destroyed is death. (27) For he has subjected everything under his feet. When it says that everything has been subjected, it clearly means except the one who has subjected everything to him. (28) And when everything has been subjected to him, then the Son himself will be subjected to the one who subjected everything to him, in order that God may be all in all.

(29) For otherwise what will those who are being baptized for the dead accomplish? If the dead are not actually raised, why are they being baptized for them? (30) And why are we in danger every hour? (31) Every day I die, by your pride, brothers, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord. (32) If so to speak I fought with wild animals at Ephesus, what would it benefit me? If the dead are not raised, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die." (33) Do not go astray: "Bad company ruins good mores." (34) Be justly sober and do not sin, for some live in complete ignorance of God. With shame I speak to you.

Exegesis. It would be an exaggeration to say that Paul's first letter to the Corinthian church was written to refute the

thesis ὅτι ἀνάστασις νεκρῶν οὐκ ἔστιν. It is not an exaggeration to say that it is the reason for the chapter under discussion. Certainly this section forms the backbone of Paul's refutation of the Corinthian version of realized eschatology and his defense of the resurrection of the dead. In Paul's mind the established fact of Christ's Resurrection, which is a doctrine that everyone accepts, is proof positive that there will soon be a resurrection of all those who have died in Christ.

Paul initiates his argument by applying the kerygma to the Corinthian situation. The substance of the kerygma, according to Paul, is the fact that Christ has been raised from the dead. His opponents' thesis negates that premise. In short, Paul argues that to deny the resurrection of the dead, perhaps by saying that through baptism the resurrection is already present (see vv. 46-49), is to deny Christ's Resurrection. If this fact is denied the conclusion is obvious: the kerygma is a lie (v. 14b); the faith of the Corinthians is empty since it is based on a lie (v. 14c). As a consequence the apostles are guilty of perjury before God, indeed of testifying against God, since they swore in God's name concerning the truth of the kerygma (v. 15). Furthermore, if there is no resurrection of the dead the whole of the Corinthian viewpoint is a kind of nihilism which threatens to destroy the church and thus everything he has worked for. In turn he is quick to point out that the Corinthians would be living a lie, their faith fruitless, and the salvation they had achieved by embracing the good news of Christ's Resurrection would be null and void (v. 17). The capstone of Paul's logical analysis, granted that one took seriously the Corinthian premise, is something which his opponents may not have bargained for. Those

Christians who have already died are hopelessly lost for all time (v. 18). Paul's summary of this part of his argument has that idea in mind. The meaning of verse 19 seems to be that if we only have hope in and no real assurance of resurrection, i.e., if the preaching of the apostles is not true and Christ has not been raised, then life would be empty and miserable. Of course, this does not take into account a different form of immortality, other than resurrection, e.g., immortality of the soul. Paul can think of immortality only in terms of resurrection.

Having attempted to persuade those who believe that there is no resurrection of the dead of the foolishness of their viewpoint, Paul suddenly alters the mood of the discussion. He moves from the conditional to the indicative mood. He turns from a summation which leaves the reader with a feeling of hopelessness and despair to attack the problem head on (v. 20). This simple declarative sentence is a reiteration of the point made in the first section of the argument, affirming again what everyone accepts as the mainstay of the apostolic preaching, the truth of the Resurrection of Christ as the first fruits of God's eschatological harvest of salvation. This turns out to be a way of introducing what one might call an anthropological redemption myth, i.e., the myth of the primal man.¹¹

Just as Adam is the prototype of the old humanity, so also is Christ the prototype of the new humanity, which is present in hope. That is to say, under the rule of Adam humanity's lot was to live in

¹¹Consult C. K. Barrett, From First Adam to Last (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1962).

anxiety, fear and despair, which is a description of life under the sentence of death eternal. Death is understood to be a demonic force whose grip on human kind has been broken by God's salvific act in Christ, the new Man. The power of death has been broken by the intervention of a loving God who has shattered the cyclic process of death and birth and decay, thereby annihilating the endless repetition of natural human existence. Paul's answer to the problem of death and the other cosmic powers is immortality through resurrection. Even though at present death seems to have the last word (i.e., in Adam all die, v. 22a), Christ is the progenitor of new life in the future. This present world is still under the rule of death. Death is a real and present danger. But the seeds of its destruction have been sown and the power of death, viz. φθoς, has been broken. The new life is realized now as hope in the perfect life of the future, when Christ rules. This understanding of the meaning of Christ's Resurrection and its salvific benefits (primarily it assures our own immortality) will be recapitulated in the summation (vv.54-58).

As if to answer the implied question of how redemption is to take place, Paul proceeds to outline an eschatological schema which is in fact an exegesis of the doctrine stated in verse 22b, a kind of blueprint of the process of redemption. A predetermined order inheres in the divine plan according to Paul. τάγμα is a technical term which was applied to military groupings. Here it is used to suggest a linear arrangement of things: Christ, who is the prototype of the promised new life (its first fruits) will return to bring new life to all who dwell in him. Thus two "groups" only are intended: Christ, the progenitor of the new

life, and those who belong to him. There is little indication that ὁ ἑσθλός means "the rest" and therefore little basis on which to erect a theory of the general resurrection as Johannes Weiss and Hans Lietzmann did. Christ's parousia will be followed by an interim period during which all demonic forces will be destroyed (v. 24). Whether God or Christ is to be the destroyer is not clear. Here it would seem to be Christ. But I will argue below that Paul corrects the impression that Christ is the one to destroy the ruling forces and powers (see v. 27).

To support his view of the interim period Paul develops, if not strictly speaking a midrash, what one might call a midrashic commentary. That is, he seems to be following the methodology laid down by rabbinic exegesis to prove his argument from Scripture. In verse 25 we find echoes of Psalm 110:1, which reads: "The Lord says to my lord, 'Sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool'." (RSV) In verse 27 Paul quotes Psalm 8:6b as a proof-text. In Psalm 8 the one addressed is God and the one to whom everything is subjected is the son of man. Although Paul may well have known that "man" and "son of man" in 8:4 are synonymous (an example of Hebrew parallelism), by the rabbinic rule of double meaning he is able to apply the latter term to the Man, Christ, thus making him the recipient of God's power according to the scriptures. At the same time he is able to correct the false impression that it is Christ he has been discussing as the subject in the divine plan. Verse 27b, a clarification of who subjects what to whom, clearly states that Paul has meant God all along. The insertion of verse 26, a parenthetical comment of perhaps later origin, which describes the ultimate destruction of ἐναντος, given the passive infinitive of καταργέω, is a further

indication of this view. Rather than subject, Christ is the one to whom everything will be subjected, in order that God may reign supremely (v. 28). Panentheism, the word that seems best to describe the meaning of ὁ θεὸς πάντα ἐν ᾧ ζῆν, means that all proceeds from God, all is contained in God, and finally all will be returned to God.

Suddenly the mood changes. From persuasive homiletical rhetoric based on the kerygma, Paul turns again to attack the Corinthian thesis. Although the line of attack is not as sharply drawn as in the following section (vv. 35-39), the feeling tone is that of the diatribe which, by definition, is a denunciation of or attack on one's opponent. By example, by use of proof-text, and through exhortation Paul further develops his refutation of the Corinthian argument.

The first example is taken from the experience of the Corinthian congregation. Apparently some in the church practiced baptism for the sake of family members who had died before baptism could be administered. The practice smacks of magic, yet Paul neither approves nor disapproves of it. He merely states that the practice of vicarious baptism belies the argument of those who say there is no resurrection of the dead. One can only assume that those pneumatikoi who emphasized the spiritualising effects of the sacrament advocated the view that through baptism as a dying and rising ceremony one achieved immortality at once. This effect was thought to extend even beyond the grave. Paul has already argued that if the dead are not raised then those who have died in Christ are lost forever (v. 18). Here he is at pains to show that if the dead are not raised, then no possible benefit can accrue to the practice of vicarious baptism for the sake of the unbaptised dead (vv. 28-29). In this manner

Paul is attempting to show his opponents that they are caught in a contradiction, faith in the present effects of baptism as a mystical dying and rising in Christ and the practice of a ceremony which is empty of meaning. Given the strong eschatological thrust of Paul's theology, one can see why he attacked his opponents so sharply. To deny the resurrection of the dead is to deny both past (the kerygma) and future (the parousia).

Paul strings three personal examples together in rapid succession (vv. 30-32). The "we" of verse 30 could well be a circumlocution for "I" (as the RSV would have it), but it could also refer to Paul and the rest of the apostles who risk real dangers and suffer real hardships daily for the sake of the gospel and the Christian churches. Paul himself "boasts" of the hardships he has endured as a servant of Christ in II Corinthians 11:16-33. Given the context of this latter passage, the reference to boasting in verse 31 of the present passage is interesting. For the suffering of hardships for the sake of the gospel is tied to the idea of "pride" (καύχημα) there as well as here. There he boasts of hardships on his own authority, strictly disclaiming the authority of the Lord (ὁ κατὰ κύριον , II Cor. 1:17). Here he swears by the pride of the Corinthians which he has ἐν χριστῷ . The implication is that the church at Corinth is very special to Paul, for whom he is willing to risk every danger and hardship.

The reference to fighting with wild animals in the Roman arena at Ephesus seems to be a hypothetical example of the potential dangers Paul faces every day. The idea that he could not have faced that kind of execution because of his Roman citizenship hardly squares with the list of

hardships already referred to.¹² Would a Roman citizen have been treated so? In any event, his point seems to be that no risk imaginable would be of any benefit if the Corinthians are right and this life is all there is. If there is no hope of being one with Christ at his parousia, then why suffer torments and risk execution daily for the sake of Christ. Why not simply follow the Epicurean formula, thinking nothing of the future by living only for the pleasure of the present moment. Apparently that is just the attitude certain gnostic sects later took. To show their utter contempt for the flesh and this world they indulged in every vice imaginable. Paul, of course, never meant to be taken literally at this point, but merely to show the absurdity of life without hope. He could at times be caustic, as Galatians 5:12 amply demonstrates.

The exhortation (vv. 33-34) includes a popular Greek saying attributed by Conzelmann to Menander, a fourth century B.C. poet. Paul uses it as a warning to avoid the company of those who advocate the belief that there is no resurrection. If verse 34a is a general paraenesis for righteous living, verse 34b implies that those who say there is no resurrection live in complete ignorance of God. Conversely, those who believe in the resurrection have the correct gnosis. Certain church members who teach a realized eschatology (perhaps the "strong brothers" alluded to in chapter 8) have no knowledge at all. Despite their claim to be pneumatikoi they lack spiritual discernment. To them Paul scathingly remarks: "Shame on you!" (v. 34c)

¹² Hans Conzelmann, 1 Corinthians (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 277 (129n).

3. the New Creation (vv. 35-49).

Translation. (35) But someone will say, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?" (36) Ignoramus! What you sow is not made alive unless it dies. (37) And what you sow, you do not sow the body which will be created, but a bare seed, perhaps of wheat or some other kind. (38) But God gives to it a body just as he has chosen, and to every one of the seeds its own body. (39) Not all flesh is the same flesh, but one kind is human, and another kind the flesh of animals, and another the flesh of birds, yet another kind of fish. (40) And there are heavenly bodies, and earthly bodies. But one is the splendor of the heavenly, still another the splendor of the earthly. (41) One kind is the splendor of the sun, and another the splendor of the moon, and another the splendor of the stars. For star differs from star in splendor.

(42) And so it is with the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruptibility. (43) It is sown in shame, it is raised in splendor. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. (44) It is sown as a psychical body, it is raised as a pneumatical body. If there is a psychical body, there is also a pneumatical one. (45) Even so it is written, "The first human being, Adam, was a living being [psyche], the last Adam a life-giving spirit [pneuma]." (46) But the pneumatical is not first but the psychical, then the pneumatical. (47) The first human being was from earth, made of dust; the second human being is from heaven. (48) As the earthy one [was], so also the earthy ones [are]; and as the heavenly one [is], so also the heavenly ones [will be]. (49) And just as we have borne the image of the earthy one, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly one.

Exegesis. This most difficult passage virtually defies explanation. In it Paul argues by analogy, anticipating practical objections to his eschatological schema. By introducing examples from nature he tries to show how God will effect the miraculous transformation of the living and the raising of the dead at Christ's parousia (to be described in the final section, vv. 50-58). Here we also see once again Paul's interesting but baffling style of hermeneutic. It is an intriguing example of apocalyptic thought, which raises vividly the problem of death and immortality.

Paul initiates the discussion with the ancient rhetorical device of the interlocutor. The questions which are posed concern the resurrection event itself and the new body. It is possible, to be sure, that here we have an example of parallelism. That is to say, the second question is merely a restatement of the first. In that case what we would have is one subject which is approached from different angles. This view is perhaps suggested by the close proximity of the subject of the dying and rising seed and the question of the new body. I am, therefore, mindful of the possibility that one question only is intended throughout the explanation to follow.

If two questions are intended, then Paul answers the second question first. Which means that verses 36-41 seem to be concerned with the problem of the new body. The answer employs examples from nature: κέρκος, σπόξ, σῶμα. Just as a seed is planted in the ground to germinate and become a new life form, so will those who have died in Christ be given a new body. No process of resurrection is intended here, but the point is that God gives to the seed a new body according to his will for that seed. While God is in no way restricted--he can after all transform the living (v. 51)--the point is that the seed is sown, it is given a new body. Likewise, the fact that there are different kinds of flesh indicates that God can create de novo resurrection flesh to clothe the new body. Furthermore, the resurrection body will be as different from the mortal body as the sun is from the moon (v. 41). The fact that certain stars outshine other stars is employed as an analogy to show how the new body might differ from the old.

Having disposed of the problem of the new body, at least to his own satisfaction, Paul proceeds to answer the first question concerning

the event of resurrection itself (vv. 42-49). The subject of σπείρα (v. 42) can only be τὸ σῶμα of the preceding section. Here Paul applies directly the analogy of the seed, thereby weaving his discussion into a univocal *gastalt*. By employing antithetical parallels he tries to show what kind of resurrection body God will create. The thought is elusive but what seems to be going on here is a prelude to a direct attack on the Corinthian doctrine, if that is what it was, of realized eschatology. Apparently what was being taught was the theology of Paul himself, but taken to an extreme.¹³ Is it possible to see this in verses 44ff.? He seems to be saying, "Yes, you are right. There is a psychical and a pneumatical body. Scripture itself proves that. But each in its own turn" (cf. vv. 23-24). In other words, Paul is urging his opponents to keep things in order, as he had urged concerning the Lord's Supper (chapter 11) and worship (chapter 14), not to put the cart before the horse. The pneumatical body is not now but then (cf. chapter 13, especially vv. 12-13).

If my interpretation has any merit, then this is the premise or thesis being advocated by the Corinthian pneumatikoi: "If there is a psychical body, there is also a pneumatical one" (v. 44b). This was a doctrine Paul himself had taught, yet interpreted by them in such a way as to say that the psychical body has already been replaced by the pneumatical one. That is to say, through baptism a magico-mystical

¹³ On how second century Valentinians understood Paul see Elaine Pagels, "'The Mystery of the Resurrection': A Gnostic Reading of I Cor. 15," Journal of Biblical Literature, XCIII, 2 (June 1974), 276-88. Her thesis is that they read him correctly, thus implying that Paul was a "proto-gnostic."

transformation of the natural body has been effected. In short, the resurrection is now.

Paul supports his own understanding of his teaching with scriptural proof (v. 45). But where is it written? There is an echo of Genesis 2:7, but the construction is singularly Pauline. The phrase εἰς πνεῦμα ζωοποιού would indicate that Paul intends for his christology to be taken as part of Scripture, or at least he claims its authority in speaking of the life-giving spirit (v. 45b) of the last Adam.

In verse 47 Paul returns to the myth of primal humanity which was discussed above in Part Two. There Adam was seen as the progenitor of death in the present and Christ as the progenitor of new life in the future. Here Paul uses the same mythological motif to refute the Corinthian argument that claimed spiritual and magical benefits through baptism. Having set the record straight as to the correct order of things (v. 46), he goes on to apply his interpretation to the situation in Corinth (vv. 47-48). While no verbs are given, it is possible to reconstruct the intentionality of the writer by paying attention to the context, as the translation tries to show. What Paul seems to be saying is that the Corinthians are still in the image of Adam ("earthly"). The bearing of the image of Christ is reserved for the future when the transformation of the quick and the dead happens (see below).

4. the Mystery of the Resurrection (vv. 50-58).

Translation. (5) Now I say this, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does that which is subject to decay inherit incorruptibility. (51) Look! I tell you a mystery: we shall not all fall asleep, but we shall all be changed, (52) in a moment, in the wink of an eye, at the last trumpet blast. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and

we shall be transformed. (53) For this perishable [flesh] must be clothed in incorruptibility, and this mortal [nature] must be clothed in immortality. (54-55) When this perishable [flesh] is clothed in incorruptibility and this mortal [nature] is clothed in immortality, then the word will come to pass which is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory. Where, o death, is thy victory? Where, o death, is thy sting?" (56) Now the sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. (57) But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord, Jesus Christ. (56) Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, excelling in the work of the Lord always. You know that your labor is not futile in the Lord.

Exegesis. Verse 50 introduces a new section. Both Jeremias¹⁴ and Conzelmann¹⁵ agree that the first half of the parallelism is not from the mind of Paul. Jeremias believes that it originates from the eschatological teaching of the early church. Conzelmann avers that the second half is Paul's exegesis of a doctrinal statement already to hand. He offers no possible provenance. In any event, it seems clear that the introduction τοῦτο δὲ φημι does anticipate a new subject. However, in light of its transitional character the possibility that it also looks back to the preceding sections cannot be eliminated. The chapter, after all, is an integral whole and not a loose collection of unrelated parts.

Jeremias' exegesis of this passage is interesting but problematic. It is difficult to believe, given the foregoing discussion (especially part three), that "the sentence 'flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God' does not speak of the resurrection of the dead but rather of the change of the living at the parousia."¹⁶ It seems to me that

¹⁴ Joachim Jeremias, "Flesh and Blood Cannot Inherit the Kingdom of God," New Testament Studies, II, 3 (February 1956), 152.

¹⁵ Conzelmann, 1 Corinthians, 289-90.

¹⁶ Jeremias, "Flesh and Blood," 154.

Conzelmann is correct. Rather than being synthetic there is a synonymous parallel between the two halves of the statement of verse 50. In that case the thought should be that just as the statement "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God" is true, so is the notion that the perishable cannot inherit the imperishable.

In verses 51-55 Paul proceeds to give his own understanding of the meaning of resurrection. The apocalyptic introduction ἴδου μετετήριον ὑμῶν λέγει might indicate that a new doctrinal teaching is to follow (so Jeremais). If not completely novel, at least he expands his understanding as we find it in I Thessalonians 4:13-18. In the latter passage there is no mention of metamorphosis at all. Here we find Paul giving the whole interpretation a new twist. While he still holds the view that not all living Christians will die before the parousia, his new insight is that those who remain will be suddenly and miraculously transformed into the image or likeness of Christ (see v. 49). At the same time the dead will be raised imperishable. The resurrection of the dead and the transformation of the living, then, jointly constitute a single unified act of God. To some extent this discussion is further clarification of the answers Paul gave to the questions of verse 35. Again the idea is that God will create bodies de novo as he chooses, bodies whose flesh will not be subject to decay. They will be immortal and incorruptible.

The living and the dead are intended in both members of the parallelism in verse 53. In his commentary Conzelmann indicates that δεῖ "denotes the apocalyptic order, not a necessity of nature."¹⁷ We have already seen how important the correct order of events is to Paul. As the

¹⁷Conzelmann, 1 Corinthians, 291.

following verse shows, only after the condition is fulfilled can death, the cosmic destroyer, the enemy, be said to be overcome. Death is still a force to be reckoned with. While the seeds of its destruction have already been sown in the Resurrection of Christ, its hold on humanity is still strong. The hope for those who dwell in Christ is the conviction that one day soon even death will be no more.

Bultmann¹⁸ has pointed out that Paul is here addressing the problem of the death-bound nature of the human condition. What Paul is saying is that everyone is dying as a consequence of sin, because law increases sin and thereby effects death (v. 56). Through Christ, however, God has destroyed sin and therefore removed the threat of death (its sting). Humanity needs no longer to live in fear of death. Its threat has been eliminated once and for all. While believers are still subject to physical death, its final destruction is assured by God's powerful act. Indeed the new life itself is present in what Bultmann calls "obedience of faith" and "acceptance of the death of Christ." This seems to mean not only the knowledge that the law has been set aside, but also acceptance of the death of Christ (to live ἐν Χριστῷ) is worked out in conduct (v. 58). The adverb ὥστε links the paraenesis directly to the victory through Christ over death, sin, and the law. On this ethical note, really a plea for patience, endurance and hope, Paul ends his defense of the resurrection of the dead.

¹⁸ Rudolf Bultmann, "σῴζω," in R. Kittel (ed.) Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), III, 20-21.

THE PREACHING OF PAUL

In our analysis of I Corinthians 15, which is Paul's defense of the Resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of the dead, we saw that for Paul the essence of the apostolic preaching is contained in the creedal formula,

that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.

The chapter was translated and analyzed in light of what may be a four-fold division, consisting of the apostolic preaching (vv. 1-11), the refutation of the argument of Paul's opponents who said "that there is no resurrection of the dead" (vv. 12-34), the new creation, or Paul's understanding of the soma pneumatikon which God will create (vv. 35-49), and finally the "mystery" of the resurrection, which is Paul's new insight pertaining to the end time, that when Christ returns both the dead and the living will be simultaneously transformed (vv. 50-58).

As we shall see in the next chapter, Chrysostom implied that the Resurrection is the summum bonum of Christian preaching. It is difficult to imagine preaching without reference to it. The earliest reference to the Resurrection we have may be seen in the proclamation kurios christos. This confessional statement was formulated apparently to express the conviction that Jesus had been raised from the dead. Therefore, as Paul recognized, the Resurrection is the first and foremost tradition of the church, which means that it serves as the source of the living stream of tradition which nourishes the life of the church. The Resurrection as the heart of the gospel pumps the life-giving blood of Christ throughout the body of Christ to all its members. It is the church's source and final

referent, the church's reason for being. Such a reality may be proclaimed only within the context of faith as a gift of God. As Schillebeeckx, argues toward the end of his truly magnificent "experiment in Christology."

The heart of the whole New Testament, as regards Jesus' resurrection and appearances . . . , the conviction that Jesus had risen (the import of the Christian proclamation), is an assurance of faith that comes from God alone.¹⁹

Let us not forget, however, that the central argument of I Corinthians 15 concerns the well-established first century belief in the resurrection of the dead, which Paul was trying to explain to contemporary Greeks. As Hans Cavallin recognizes, Paul, in speaking of resurrection, was speaking of life after death.²⁰ Paul based certainty in life after death on the confession of faith in Christ's Resurrection, which was no doubt for Paul an unquestioned historical fact. Whether one argues the historicity of Resurrection or its truth in the history of faith, however, is not as important as how Resurrection functions vis a vis the meaning of life. The Resurrection as historical fact is not unimportant. But its relationship to faith and life after death is the crucial issue here. What is really important is the affirmation that Jesus is alive, however one may understand how or why he lives, whether it be in the human heart or in the ongoing life of the church as some form of mystical consciousness. Furthermore, the implication of Paul's understanding of the meaning the Resurrection is that since Jesus died and is yet alive, those who

¹⁹ Edward Schillebeeckx, Jesus (New York: Seabury Press, 1979), 649.

²⁰ Hans Cavallin, Life After Death (Lund: Gleerup, 1974).

believe in Christ and the power of the Resurrection may die and still live. When Paul interpreted the Resurrection in terms of the certainty of life after death, he was implicitly answering the mind boggling question, what happens to the faithful when they die? His answer was that those who have died in Christ will one day live again in recognizable form. He believed that at the moment of resurrection there would be a simultaneous and miraculous transformation of the living and the dead into the image and likeness of Christ. This seems to mean that for Paul the resurrection will complete the process--which was begun in Christ--of restoring creation to its pristine state, which was corrupted by the sin of Adam who brought death into the world. In Adam, according to Paul's anthropology, the image of God was all but destroyed. In Christ it will be restored and Paradise will be regained. In the meantime, Christians must wait in faith and hope and love for God to act. What did five historical representatives of Christian preaching make of all of this? That is the question we shall try to answer.

Chapter 3

JOHN CHRYSOSTOM: PASTOR AND PREACHER

John Chrysostom stood at the apex of preaching in the ancient church. He was a representative of the Eastern or Greek church tradition, a contemporary of St. Augustine in the West. Stephen Neill has written:

John Chrysostom was the greatest preacher of the early Church, and this means that he must be reckoned among the greatest preachers of the word of God in this history of the Church from the days of the apostles to our own time.¹

Neill's rationale for the study of Chrysostom's sermons would apply to other preachers as well. One studies them because of the light they shed on the lives of people whose names are not recorded in the history books.

At the heart of Chrysostom's education was the study of rhetoric. Dom Baur, while not minimizing the spiritual stream of thought which flowed into John's life by way of the Bible, nevertheless rightly emphasizes the great importance of his Greek background. The Greek way did after all represent the sum total of human knowledge of that day. Baur writes:

The whole of cultural and educational concerns in the fourth century rested on a foundation of the ancient Greek culture, which had reached the zenith of its splendor six or seven hundred years earlier.²

¹Stephen Neill, Chrysostom and His Message (New York: Association Press, 1962), 7.

²Chrysostomus Baur, John Chrysostom and His Times (London: Sands, 1959), I, 9.

All the world "went to the Greek grammarians, rhetoricians and sophists to serve their apprenticeship in learning, in order to approach the yet unattained sources of classical culture and knowledge."³ Young John probably cut his intellectual teeth on the literature of Homer, Hesiod, Demosthenes, Herodotus et al. and the philosophies of Pythagoras, Plato and Aristotle.

Chrysostom, the great popular preacher of the day, was "above all the preacher of the Christian life; gently and patiently he tries to lead his hearers forward in the way of holiness; they are to learn to reproduce in daily word and action the very life of Christ Himself."⁴ An analysis of his sermons reveals no outstanding sermon preparation plan. His method, like Augustine's, was to expound on the Scripture, book by book, chapter by chapter, verse by verse. His sermons were "a real exposition of the word of God; and often that sharp and piercing word will find its target in the hearts of the hearers."⁵ Above all his sermons were dialogic, revealing that he was in touch with his hearers.

Chrysostom was a biblical expositor in the Antiochene exegetical style. Antioch's "cool and careful scholars started from the idea that the first task of the student is to understand just what the text means, and that the first task of the preacher is to expound the meaning of the text just as it stands."⁶ He therefore sought the literal meaning of the

³ Ibid.

⁴ Neill, 17.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., 9.

text. Where he took exception with the allegorical method was its inability to explain the plain meaning of the text. In his homilies on the Sermon on the Mount, for example, unlike Augustine Chrysostom seems intent to show how Jesus' new law applies literally to the situation of people in the world. One gathers that it was his purpose to demonstrate the reasonableness of Christ's teaching. Furthermore, he evidently believed that he had discovered the secret of Christ's persuasiveness through an analysis of Christ's rhetoric. He analyzed the language of Jesus in terms of classical Greek rhetoric.⁷ To some degree he paralleled Augustine at this point. Augustine also tried to show how preaching ought to be kerygmatic. De doctrina Christiana is essentially "an introduction to the interpretation and explanation of the Bible."⁸ One might therefore say that Augustine's purpose was to show how the proper use of biblical language might lend power to proclamation.

Chrysostom loved to preach. Without making this a paean to his abilities, one is moved to say that the history of preaching would have been the poorer had he not assumed the priestly office, something he was reluctant to do. In discussing his oratorical power, Baur has this to say:

As he is, he allows to be felt, more than anyone else, the power of persuasion, that power of which the human language is capable, if it is engaged in the service of a splendid ideal, if reason⁹ builds its foundations and fantasy provides its decorative trappings.

⁷ John Chrysostom, The Preaching of Chrysostom (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 25.

⁸ Augustine, On Christian Doctrine (Indianapolis: Liberal Arts Press, 1958), ix.

⁹ Baur, 226.

Chrysostom's persuasive power was not unlimited, however. It is evident from the many sermons which decry his people's everlasting pursuit of pleasure at the theater and the circus that he often felt despair at the apparent ineffectualness of his moral suasion. In sermon after sermon one hears his ceaseless and apparently tireless efforts to urge his flock to leave off the pursuit of earthly pleasure and seek first the good things of heaven, which were promised by the apostles of Christ. His greatest joy, according to Baur, came from seeing the progress made by his hearers in spiritual matters. His greatest sorrow came when people left the church to attend the Sunday games: horse racing; charioteering; and animal hunts. Although this was a constant thorn in his flesh, Baur says that he "never let himself be discouraged for long, nor let himself be moved from his always steady fervor for the preaching office."¹⁰

Chrysostom is perhaps of some importance in the history of exegesis. He learned theology, which consisted primarily in the more or less systematic exposition of Scripture, from Diodorus, "who was head of the catechetical school at Antioch and afterwards Bishop of Tarsus (378-394)."¹¹ Theology at this stage, therefore, may be understood as the continual reading and explanation of Scripture, with a primary emphasis on history and the human nature of Christ. This latter point is a clear

¹⁰ Ibid., 253.

¹¹ J. W. C. Wand, A History of the Early Church to A.D. 500 (4th ed.; London: Methuen, 1963), 218.

characteristic of the Antiochene school, as opposed to the somewhat pneumatic view of the school at Alexandria.

Baur has identified approximately eighteen thousand scriptural quotations in the homilies and other writings of Chrysostom, including seven thousand from the Old Testament and eleven thousand from the New Testament. The most frequently quoted books of the Old Testament are Psalms (more than fifteen hundred times), Genesis (more than nine hundred), Exodus (more than three hundred), Job (over three hundred), and Isaiah (at least seven hundred times). In the New Testament the favorites are Matthew (twenty-four hundred quotes), Mark (two hundred plus), Luke (more than nine hundred times), and John (over twenty-one hundred times). I and II Corinthians are cited more than twenty-one hundred times and Romans over nine hundred times. Revelation, II Peter, II and III John and Jude are never quoted. This may be due to the fact that the canon was still fluid in the fourth century Greek church.

Although it is true that Chrysostom made important contributions to the history of Christian interpretation (the sheer volume of his exegetical writings verifies that fact), Baur nonetheless exaggerates his influence when he says:

Chrysostom was of very special significance for the history and the destiny of exegesis, . . . [in] that his surpassing authority tipped the scales in favor of the historical-grammatical method of interpretation, rather than the prevailing allegorical method.¹²

It has been shown, on the contrary, that despite the fact that Chrysostom's works were extensively reproduced by the church of the Middle Ages,

¹²Baur, 319.

his exegetical method, or more precisely the Antiochene method, was all but lost to Christian interpretation in the West. That is why Beryl Smalley says that Chrysostom "was by far the best-known representative of Antiochene principles in the west, and, at the same time, the author who could teach his readers least about Antiochene exegesis."¹³ She continues:

Much of the Antiochene material was irretrievably lost to the medieval Latin student. He never at any time had the opportunity to soak himself in the works of Theodore. On the other hand, enough material existed in the early middle ages to enable a Latin reader to learn at least the principles of Antiochene exegesis and to experiment with them if he wished. . . . The Antiochenes in fact were generally neglected.¹³

Since Antiochene exegesis was by and large ignored by medieval students, allegory won the day. With the notable exception of the twelfth century Victorine school in Paris, allegory has remained the stock-in-trade of Catholicism down to this day. Even the modern theory of sensus plenior¹⁴ has a closer affinity to Alexandria than to Antioch, and this despite its vague similarity to the Antiochene theoria. Perhaps a more reasoned approach to Scripture and its relation to the magisterium could have prevented Luther's revolt against the church and its misuse of traditional authority.

To return to the Baur quotation on the preceding page, one can safely say that the historical-grammatical method of interpretation,

¹³Beryl Smalley, The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1964), 19.

¹⁴Raymond E. Brown, "The History and Development of the Theory of Sensus Plenior," Catholic Biblical Quarterly, XV (April 1953), 141-162.

while present in germ among the Antiochenes, did not reach maturity until the high middle ages with the Humanists. It did not fully flower until Luther. This is not to belittle the accomplishments of Antioch, nor to ignore the contribution of Chrysostom to the ongoing task of biblical hermeneutics. One can still learn a great deal from his careful and painstaking approach to the task of exegesis, not to mention the fruitful results of that work in the form of its moral application (Ethikon) to the life of his hearers. Still in all, one must be cautious in his evaluation of the impact of Chrysostom's method on the development of Christian interpretation.

THEORY OF PREACHING

In order to understand the preaching of John Chrysostom, it is necessary to examine his presuppositions concerning the way Scripture (the Word of God) inheres in the homiletic event. Robert Hill is speaking of Chrysostom's understanding of the relation of Scripture to preaching when he writes that "Chrysostom speaks of homilies on the Word of God as sharing the characteristics of the Word itself."¹⁵ Hill points out that the Bible as the Word of God, from the point of view of Chrysostom, is God's conversation through which he condescends to reveal his true nature and being. God's speaking is linguistic condescension, i.e., a favor to humankind. Revelation is the principal effect for which God condescended to communicate his Word.

¹⁵Robert Hill, "St. John's Teaching on Inspiration," Vigiliae Christianae, XXII, 4 (April 1968), 20.

A good example of this may be found in Chrysostom's first homily on the gospel of John, whose subject is essentially divine inspiration.

He writes:

For he [John] will say nothing to us as a man, but what he says, he will say from the depths of the Spirit, from those secret things which before they came to pass the very angels knew not; since they too have learned by the voice of John with us . . . the things which we know. (XIV, Homily 1, 2)¹⁶

The preacher seems to be saying that out of the depths of ultimate reality comes the condescending Word which reveals the secret things (the "mysteries") of God. Since the homily participates organically in the divine speech, there can be no casual attention paid to the preacher. The Bible is God speaking his Word to man. Because the homily shares the characteristics of divine speech itself the situation on the part of the hearer is one of absolute reverence and seriousness. Preaching and listening are serious business. Chrysostom offers the following admonition to his audience:

. . . let us preserve deep silence, both external and mental, but especially the latter; for what advantage is it that the mouth be hushed, if the soul is disturbed and full of tossing? I look for that calm which is of the mind, of the soul, since it is the hearing of the soul which I require. (XIV, Homily 1, 2)

He goes on to add that the sermon is a vessel to carry us from earth to heaven. This extended metaphor compares the homily with a boat, the preacher's tongue with the sail, the grace of the Spirit with the breeze, and the Cross with the rudder and oar. Preaching, therefore, is not a

¹⁶ John Chrysostom, "Homilies on the Gospel of St. John," in A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1956), 1st Ser; XIV. Reference is made here and in all subsequent quotations to volume, homily and page number.

casual act but the way to Heaven, which is analogous to the Greek understanding of how the Eucharist carries the communicant to the table of the Lord in Heaven, surrounded by the heavenly host. Preaching is a sacramental act which demands the utmost from the congregation. It is a divine act of communication between God and the world, that which joins together heaven and earth. It has a sacerdotal quality. Furthermore, it is an incarnational experience: the divine logos is joined with human speech in the act of proclamation.

Primarily what preaching does is reveal the love of God. This is a central motif in Chrysostom's homilies, many of which might be entitled "On the Love of God." Love is an essential part of God's being. One must not say that God is good because he loves, but God loves because he is good. This is made clear by the homily on John 3:16 (XIV, Homily 27). The place where the love of God is most clearly revealed is the Cross, which is understood by Chrysostom as an act of divine power and love. God's love is made manifest in his redeeming act of goodness on the Cross. In his sermon on John 11:30ff., the raising of Lazarus is seen as a type of the Resurrection of Christ. The principle Chrysostom lays down is that the bringing back to life is a greater act of power and love than is the prevention of death. If we apply this principle to the crucifixion and Resurrection we can see that God's goodness and love are not manifest in the prevention of Jesus' death but in the powerful act of raising him from the dead. This is a guiding presupposition of Chrysostom's hermeneutic of the Cross.

PREACHING THE CROSS AND RESURRECTION

The problem with the preceding analysis is that it is not quite correct to say that God raised Jesus from the dead. Jesus as the incarnation of the divine logos participated in the deity to the extent that he had the power to raise himself from the dead. Jesus as God on earth was omnipotent. He was so powerful that he overcame death itself. By this act he assured humanity of salvation by granting the gift of immortality. This view of power is seen in the homily on Matthew 20:17-19, Jesus' prediction of the passion. The apostles, Chrysostom says, were ignorant concerning the Resurrection. They could not understand how anyone could raise himself from the dead. This means that the apostles were ignorant of Christ's power. Chrysostom says:

For this cause also they felt pain. For some they had known to be raised again by other persons, but for anyone to have raised up himself again, and in such fashion as to have raised himself as not to die anymore, they had never known. (X, Homily 65, 398)

God was fully present in Jesus Christ according to our preacher. Chrysostom's sense of the basic identity of God and Christ is so strong that it gets in the way of interpretation. That is the only way one can explain his understanding of Jesus' cry of abandonment on the Cross (Matthew 27:46). This demonstrates, according to the preacher, that Jesus "honors his Father, and is no adversary of God . . . and shows how he is of one mind with him that begat him." (X, Homily 88, 520) It is obvious that for Chrysostom Christ is imbued with the omnipotence of God insofar as he believes Christ raised himself from the dead. Thus he has an extremely high Christology, almost to the exclusion of the Creator. It is no exaggeration to say that the creative

power of God as seen, for example, in Genesis 1, is understood by Chrysostom to have come to reside in Christ. He therefore seems intent on interpreting the entire Bible in light of Johannine Christology. That is, according to Chrysostom the divine logos, which is the essence of God's self-revelation, resided in the human Jesus. The generative power of the logos caused miracles to happen. The greatest miracle of all was the power of life over death.

THE DEATH OF JESUS: AN ACT OF POWER

Jesus' power over life and death was the power to lay down his own life. This is how Chrysostom understands Matthew 27:50, which speaks of Jesus' yielding up his life. He interprets this expression in light of John 10:18:

This is what he said, "I have the power to lay down my life, and I have power to take it again," and, "I lay it down of myself." So for this cause he cried with the voice, that it might be shown that the act is done by power. (X, Homily 88, 521)

Chrysostom can admit no human weakness or flaw in the perfect Jesus. Even his very dying was no sign of weakness but a sign of divine power. The creator God of the Old Testament fully resided in the man Jesus, who was the logos principle in the flesh. Such a man could not be killed but condescended to die. That is to say, Jesus laid down his life voluntarily as a favor to humanity. His life was not taken by force any more than he was captured by force. One might say that just as he allowed himself to be captured by the authorities, indeed he had foreknowledge of the betrayal and the arrest (Matthew 26:20-25), he also allowed himself to die. Chrysostom does not understand the expression

"Jesus gave up his spirit" as an idiomatic way of saying he died. He interprets it as an act of power.

Despite this impressive display, however, the "race of man" did not believe. The human race, it would seem, is typified by those who paid the soldiers to spread the news that the disciples stole the body (Matthew 28:11-15). In commenting on this report Chrysostom says that "they even gave money in order to corrupt others, and to steal away the history of the resurrection." (X, Homily 88, 521) This most interesting phrase, 'to steal away the history of the resurrection,' seems to mean that for Chrysostom the Resurrection is truly historical and not mythological. It is not a sign or a symbolic way of speaking of divine power, but a historical fact whose veracity was corrupted by unbelievers. It does not stretch the imagination to its limits to speculate that Chrysostom had in mind more than the first century. He was more than mindful of the Manichees, whose interpretation of the Resurrection implied that Christ died in appearance only. This remnant of the gnostic mood, with its doctrine of the inherent evil of the flesh, could not accept the full humanity of Jesus, which was the cornerstone of Antiochene Christology. Even though Chrysostom himself seems to have had problems with Jesus' real humanity, here he is constrained to show that Jesus was a real person, a human being, and not a phantasm who only appeared to die.

Proofs of the Resurrection

In his homily on Matthew 27:62-64 Chrysostom identifies two major proofs of the Resurrection and in the homily on Matthew 28:11-14

a third. They are the empty tomb, the renewed spirit of the disciples following their sadness at the crucifixion, and the story of the money paid to the soliders to say that the body had been stolen.

The empty tomb. Even though the Jews sealed the stone and set a guard, the tomb was still found to be empty. This proves two things, that Jesus really was dead and that he really did rise from the dead. Furthermore, it demonstrates that the disciples could not have stolen the body. This discussion reveals that Chrysostom has the schema of the confession of faith which Paul transmitted in mind, that Christ died and was buried and was raised from the dead.

The chief priests and the Pharisees, says Chrysostom, have already proved that Christ died. Matthew 27:63 has them say to Pilate, "Sir, we remember how that impostor said, while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise again.'" According to the preacher the phrase 'while he was still alive' proves that when he was put in the sepulchre Jesus was truly dead. This implies that Jesus was really raised from the dead and not merely resuscitated.

The rulers have also proved that Christ was buried, meaning that his body really did reside in the tomb. Verse 64 goes on to quote the rulers to say, "Therefore order the sepulchre to be made secure until the third day, lest his disciples go and steal him away, and tell the people, 'He has risen from the dead.' And the last fraud will be worse than the first." The fact that they wanted the tomb sealed and guarded against the disciples is proof in the preacher's mind that Christ was buried.

Now they prove the third article of faith, Resurrection:

For because it was sealed, there was no unfair dealing [this means that the body was not stolen]. But if there were no unfair dealing, and the sepulchre was found empty, it is manifest that he is risen, plainly and incontrovertibly." (X, Homily 89, 525)

This last argument is a two edged sword. It both 'proves' the Resurrection against the opponents of Christ in the first century and cuts across the argument of the opponents of orthodoxy in the fourth. Like all the doctors of the church Chrysostom is an apologete. All of his discourses have this dual purpose in mind. The rhetorical device he employs is that method of argumentation which proves what one is saying by referring to one's opponent's own words. To show that even one's opponents prove one's case brings the argument home with greater force. It also affords deep insight into Chrysostom's use of the New Testament as a legal document. The tone of the argument is almost rabbinical in its use of Scripture to prove it.

The revived spirit of the disciples. As we shall see below, the second proof is the most important for Chrysostom. He cannot understand how this disheartened band of ignorant laborers could have become an earth shaking force except in terms of an act of divine power, namely, the spirit of the risen Christ which empowered them to turn the world upside down. Already he is interpreting the resurrection of the dead in terms of this phenomenal revival of the human spirit. He seems to be asking this question: where did they get their courage if not from the risen Christ? He is deeply impressed by the fact that a badly frightened, discouraged group of men and women were empowered to persuade the world of the truth of the Resurrection. Further proof of this same point is offered in the ability of the apostles to work miracles in Christ's name.

In his homily on John 11:30ff., which is on the raising of Lazarus as a type of the Resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of the dead (Christ will raise all Christians some day), we find this thought:

Since it was not so wonderful that he while alive should work miracles, as that when he was dead others should be enabled to work in his name greater than he wrought. This was an indisputable proof of the resurrection (XIV, Homily 63, 234)

Here the power of the risen Christ is seen to reside in the apostles who were enabled to work miracles simply by the repetition of Christ's name.

The payment of money. The final proof of the Resurrection is found in the story of the payment of money made to the soldiers to say that the body had been stolen (Matthew 28:11-14). Here is the argument:

For indeed even this establishes the resurrection, the fact I mean of their saying, that the disciples stole him. For this is the language of men confessing that the body was not there. When therefore they confess the body was not there, but the stealing of it is shown to be false and incredible, by their watching by it, and by the seals, and by the timidity of the disciples, the proof of the resurrection even hence appears incontrovertible. (X, Homily 90, 512)

The reference to 'the timidity of the disciples' is another facet of the argument that they were empowered by the risen one to become the church. The disciples, he is saying, were so dispirited by the crucifixion that it is illogical to assume that they could have had the courage to sneak past an armed guard and steal the body. They were encouraged later on.

Chrysostom returns to this idea in his commentary on the death and burial recorded in John 19. In commenting on the burial clothes as a sign of the Resurrection he remarks:

For neither, if any persons had removed the body, would they before doing so have stripped it; no, if any had stolen it, would they have taken the trouble to remove the napkin, and roll it up, and lay it in a place by itself; but how? they would have taken the body as it was. (XIV, Homily 85, 320-321)

We saw above that Chrysostom interpreted Matthew in light of John. Here it is vice versa. Chrysostom is interpreting the Johannine version of the empty tomb in terms of the story of the rumor of the stolen body recounted by Matthew. But there is no hint that the writer of the fourth gospel knew of such a story or that he was attempting to defend against it. Chrysostom is harmonizing the gospel accounts to bring them in line with his own theory (or more probably the position of his party).

EFFECT OF PREACHING THE RESURRECTION ON CHRISTIAN BEHAVIOR

We have seen that for Chrysostom preaching participates in God's conversation with humankind. It is in a sense God's past communication as the revelation of his goodness and love "re-presented." It should engender faith in the Resurrection and resurrection.

Chrysostom firmly believed in the Resurrection of Jesus and the resurrection of the dead. These two doctrines are, after all, central to the confessing tradition. He reinterpreted the idea of resurrection in terms of the encouragement and empowerment which the apostles and others received by the indwelling of the risen Christ, who is practically co-creator with God the Father and is virtually identified with God the Holy Spirit (see, e.g., his homily on John 20:11-17, XIV, Homily 86). Encouragement is not restricted to the past, however. It is available to people in the present by virtue of the preached Word.

What effect should preaching the Resurrection have on Christian behavior? It ought to dispell the fear of death. In his homily on the second chapter of Hebrews (XIV, Homily on Hebrews 4), for example, Chrysostom speaks on the subject of Christian behavior at funerals.

Christians should serve as an example for nonbelievers by avoiding any unseemly display of grief, such as the tearing of hair and shrieking. Nonbelievers watch what Christians do, the preacher warns, and when they see unseemly behavior at funerals they do not take Christian preaching seriously. Faith in the Resurrection of Jesus, who assures one's own immortality, should have the effect of destroying one's fear of death and therefore lessening one's grief. He quotes "Paul" to the effect that "through death he might destroy him who has the power of death . . . and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage." (Hebrews 2:14-15; the writer is speaking of Jesus) In short, excessive grief at the death of a friend or a relative is a sign of disbelief in the resurrection. It is also one of the main causes of disbelief among the heathen and causes preaching the Resurrection of Jesus to be of no avail. That is probably why we hear the incessant refrain: Do not disbelieve the Resurrection.

Later on in these same homilies on Hebrews Chrysostom has an occasion to point to the Old Testament as a way of proving the resurrection of the dead. In his sermon on Hebrews 11:17-19 he takes over the writer's understanding of the offering of Isaac, that God has the power to raise from the dead. This phrase in Greek would seem to be a confessional formula of the primitive church which Chrysostom takes over to persuade his hearers of the truth of resurrection. In other words, he takes Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son as a sign that God can restore people to life. He says:

But if Abraham so many years before believed 'that God is able to raise from the dead,' much more ought we to believe it. You see that death had not yet entered in, and yet He drew them at once to the

hope of the resurrection, and led them to such full assurance, that when bidden, they even slay their own sons, and readily offer up those from whom they expected to people the world. (XIV, Homily on Hebrews 24, 478)

This is an interesting interpretation of the binding of Isaac in which his release is understood as a type of the resurrection, or at least a foreshadowing of it. Christians, therefore, ought not to disbelieve it.

We turn now to Chrysostom's treatment of the first letter of Paul to the Corinthians. We cannot grasp his understanding of the Resurrection unless we first comprehend his view of the crucifixion. Therefore we shall examine his theology of the Cross as he understands the teaching of Paul. We shall see that his basic presupposition is that rather than being a sign of weakness and shame, the Cross signifies the power of Christ to turn weakness into strength. This point is a variation of what Paul called the folly of the preaching of the Cross and is the most important Resurrection proof Chrysostom himself is able to offer. The homilies to be examined are on the following texts: 1 Cor. 1:18-27; I Cor. 2:6-7; I Cor. 5:8; and I Cor. 15.¹⁷

ON THE FOOLISHNESS OF THE WORD OF THE CROSS (I Cor. 1:18-20)

The central concern of this homily (IV) is the foolishness of the preaching of the apostles. The question which is raised is implied by Mark 15:31-32, namely, how could one who could not help himself help others? It is not reasonable. Chrysostom's answer is that the Cross transcends reason:

¹⁷ These sermons, numbers IV, V, VII, XV, XVII, XXXVIII, XXXIX, and XL are in John Chrysostom, "Homilies on First Corinthians" in The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Church, Ser. 1, XII, 1-269.

True, o man, for indeed it is above reason; and unspeakable is the power of the cross. For that being actually in the midst of horrors, he should have shown himself above all horrors; and being in the enemy's hold should have overcome; this comes by means of infinite power . . . His not dying would not have been so inconceivable, as that having died he should loose the bands of death . . . He descended not from the cross, not because he could not, but because he would not. For him whom the tyranny of death restrained not, how could the nails of the cross restrain? (XII, Homily 4, 17)

Here again is the apologete who is defending the power of Jesus. For Chrysostom the power of the Resurrection was inherent in the crucified one. God's infinite power resided so fully in Jesus on the Cross that had he willed not to die he could have descended from the Cross. The sign of such power is not that he chose not to die but instead 'loosed the bands of death.' He did not descend from the Cross, i.e., help himself, because he could not, but because he chose not to do so. In a sense one might say that his not descending was an act of condescension. The Cross, contrary to human reason and logic, is a sign of omnipotence, not impotence.

Just as the Cross transcends reason, according to Chrysostom, so does faith in the Cross transcend human wisdom. Human wisdom is defined as that which is apparent in those works whereby it was God's will to make himself known, the creation of the world, for example. But this way of discovering God, by reasoning from the created order to a Creator God, is bankrupt. It did not make God known. Chrysostom says:

Since then by this wisdom the world was unwilling to discover God, he employed what seemed to be foolishness, i.e. the gospel, to persuade men, not by reasoning, but by faith. It remains that where God's wisdom is, there is no longer need of man's. For before, to infer that he who made the world . . . must in all reason be a God possessed of a certain uncontrollable, unspeakable power; and by this means to apprehend him; this was the part of human wisdom. But now we need no more reasonings, but faith alone. For to believe

on him that was crucified and buried, and to be fully persuaded that this person both rose again and sat down on high, this does not need wisdom, nor reasonings, but faith . . . For this transcends all human understanding. (XII, Homily 4, 17)

Even though he decries the wisdom which attempted to deduce the infinite power of God from the fact of creation, nonetheless he uses a rational argument to persuade his hearers of the power of faith truly to understand the nature of God. By so arguing he seems to recognize that no appeal to events will persuade anyone of the truth of the gospel, but only the innermost certainty which is born of faith. Having duly accepted the death, burial, Resurrection and ascension of Jesus in faith, one is then free to develop a rational argument to show how this schema reveals the infinite power which resided in the crucified one. Chrysostom admits that the history of the Resurrection, from death and burial to ascension, surpasses human understanding. He denies that this same history may not be employed to prove the omnipotence of Christ on the Cross. In a sense he is saying that human and divine persuasion ought to coalesce in a form of proclamation whereby faith instructs reason.

The upshot of his argument is this: the Cross attracts even as it repels. The Cross in its contrariness to human wisdom is proof of great power and divine wisdom. The type of the power of the Cross is seen in the story of Elisha and the axe handle (II Kings 6:5-7) The power of the Cross, therefore, extends back to the time of the prophets:

By means of the prophets again with a small piece of wood he [Christ] raised up iron from the bottom. In like manner also with the cross he has drawn the world to himself. For as the water carries the earth, so also the cross carries the world. (XII, Homily 4, 18)

We can see from this quotation that Chrysostom lived in a Christocentric universe. Christ was there in the ancient days with the prophets, aiding them and guiding their actions. Indeed, one might say that Christ empowered the prophets. Christ was there at the center of creation, working out things by their opposites. From this standpoint it is only one brief step to a hermeneutic of the Cross whereby weakness and shame are turned into strength and glory. Chrysostom's dialectic, which is really a conviction based on opposites, is summarized simply and directly:

You see now, it is proof of great power and wisdom, to convince by means of the things which tell directly against us. Thus the cross seems to be a matter of offence; and yet far from offending, it even attracts. (XII, Homily 4, 18-19)

Continuing his argument from opposites, he goes on to demonstrate the superiority of the divine foolishness by appealing to the contrast between the unwillingness of Socrates to drink the hemlock to the willingness of the martyrs to suffer torment and death. Here is what he says:

For not against their will did the martyrs endure, but of their will, and being at liberty not to suffer, showing forth fortitude harder than all adamant. This then you see is no great wonder that he whom I was mentioning drank hemlock; it being no longer in his power not to drink, and also when he had arrived at a very great age. (XII, Homily 4, 19)

Is this fair to Plato's account? By way of contrast he appeals to the accounts of torture which was endured willingly by ancient Christians: nails torn out; joints wrenched asunder; dismemberment; etc. All of this is recounted to demonstrate the superiority of the Christian gospel, the foolish word of the Cross, to Greek philosophy.

But the point that he really wants to make is that the courage of the early church is proof of the Resurrection of Christ. For

Chrysostom the one irrefutable proof of Christ's triumph in power at Easter is the fact that a band of frightened, bewildered people was empowered somehow to go out and overcome the entire world. He can understand the success of the Christian movement, in the agony of its initial discouragement and disbelief vis a vis the death of Jesus and subsequent persecutions, only in terms of an act of infinite power at the hand of the crucified and risen one. It is unreasonable, he believes, to assume that anything short of a miracle empowered the apostles.

How, I ask, could all this be reasonable, I will not say as something to be done, but even as something to be imagined? From whence it is plain that had they not seen him after he was risen, and received most ample proof of his power, they would not have ventured so great a cast. (XII, Homily 4, 20)

The question he is asking the world, to put it another way, is how did the weak overcome the strong? How in the face of such insuperable odds did the church manage to survive? The only conceivable answer for the apologist Chrysostom is through divine intervention: the apostles had an omnipotent ally. Employing the language of war, he says that the apostles "attacked all and overthrew all, and overran the whole world in a short time . . . For they had an ally greater than all these, the power of him that had been crucified and was risen again."

GOD CHOSE THE FOOLISH: (I COR. 1:26-27)

In the fifth homily on First Corinthians Chrysostom restates the central question of the preceding discourse: "From whence did it enter their thoughts to expect to overcome the world, unless they had seen Christ after he was risen?" In an imaginative way he reconstructs

the attitude of the disciples themselves in order to demonstrate the truth of his assertion that the risen Christ empowered the early church. If Christ had not risen the disciples would have hated him as a deceiver and betrayer. They would have declared him an imposter and would not have praised him. If Christ had not risen they would have admitted the charge that they stole the body in order to enjoy the honor of the nation and not risk insult and rejection. If Christ had not risen they would not have preached the gospel in his name, "but would have treated him with abhorrence." (XII, Homily 5, 26) Quite obviously there is no room in his thinking for the idea of a 'passover plot.' The disciples did what they did because Christ favored them with his presence.

The preacher lifts up the theme of the sermon again and again, more than ten times in a single discourse.

What? Were they beside themselves to reckon upon any such thing inconsiderately and at random? How did they succeed in it if they were insane and frenzied?

. . . what made them expect to convince their hearers, by inviting them to heaven and the mansions above?

Tell me then, what were the enticing arguments whereupon they acted, when about to take hold of the gospel, and to go forth into the world?

And why, if he rose not again, did they preach that he was risen?

Again, from whence came their high doctrines?

Upon what ground did they expect to convince the world?

Now, if the expectation that he would die and rise again was such a grief to them, had they failed to see him after he was risen, how could it be less than annihilation?

For if, while miracles were taking place, certain soldiers were persuaded to testify the contrary, upon what ground did they expect without miracles to do the work of preachers, and without having a penny to convince land and sea of the resurrection?

Tell me then what ground had men for attending to those of whom we are speaking.

What in the world then set them rushing into such great dangers?

Upon what ground then did they hope to succeed?

The answer, not surprisingly, is by the power of God who is virtually identified with the risen Jesus. In a remarkably simple way Chrysostom summarizes the thrust of his discourse by saying that "everyone, I suppose, can see that not by human power but by divine grace they did all things." (XII, Homily 5, 28) This sermon, and others like it (see e.g., homily VI: " . . . tell me, how did they overcome without divine power?"), is vintage apologetics. The by now familiar theme, that the church could not have succeeded without the infusion of divine grace in the form of the risen Christ, is developed in an almost endless variety of expression. The modern reader is left with the feeling that by sheer repetition Chrysostom would establish the truth of the Resurrection

THE MYSTERY OF GOD'S WISDOM IN THE APOSTOLIC PREACHING: (I Cor. 2:6-7)

In homily VII Chrysostom speaks on the secret wisdom of God which is contained in the kerygma of the apostles, to wit: "but we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery." (I Cor. 2:6b) Here is the content of the kerygma according to Chrysostom:

For what said the preachers? That we must worship the crucified, and count him as God, who was born of a Jewish woman. Now who would have been persuaded by these words, unless divine power had led the way? That indeed he had been crucified and buried, all men knew; but that he had risen again and ascended, no one save the apostles had seen. (XII, Homily 7, 41)

Not only did Christ empower the apostles to go forth and preach the gospel but he led the way to prepare humankind to receive the message.

Christ's power was manifest not only in raising himself from the dead but in the empowerment of the apostles and in the preparatio evangelii.

The preacher seems to be saying that the faith inspired by the preaching of the apostles was itself an act of power and grace and divine intervention. The apostolic preaching itself was a miracle because it engendered faith in those who heard the message. This point is perhaps best illustrated by listing what Chrysostom calls common objections to the preaching of the apostles and by summarizing his responses. (XII, Homily 7, 41-42)

First objection.

" . . . they excited them by promises and deceived them by an empty sound of words." This argument is countered by saying that the fact of endured hardships here on earth, with only the promise of a forthcoming resurrection, is proof of divine power. This is a return to the argument from opposites, in this case comparing heavenly and earthly benefits. To wit:

. . . first, their working conviction at once touching matters so important in persons that had never in their lives before heard of any such thing; secondly, that they prevailed on them to take the difficulties upon trial, and to account the blessings as a matter of hope.

This seems to mean that the apostles were able to convince the world of the truth of their message without appealing to earthly rewards.

Instead, they made promises which were based on the conviction of unseen things in heaven. This is interpreted as proof of divine power working in the mind of the hearers.

Second objection.

" . . . the folly . . . of the greater part caused them to believe what was told." A variation on the first objection, this criticism assumes that the world believed a monstrous lie by being fooled. Chrysostom's rejoinder is that the Greeks did not embrace the Christian faith out of foolishness, but only when they came to see that their former religious education was contrary to nature and the Christian doctrine was according to nature. Again, the wisdom of Greek philosophy has been superseded by the foolishness of the gospel. The preacher's critique of his own education is in evidence here.

Third objection.

" . . . but the persons convinced . . . were slaves, and women, and nurses, and midwives and eunuchs." Chrysostom's response does not question the cultural presupposition, but emphasizes the miraculous nature of the power which could elevate such "nonentities."

For if they persuaded wise men only, the result would not have been so wonderful; but in advancing slaves, and nurses, and eunuchs unto such great severity of life as to make them rivals of angels, they offered the greatest proof of their divine inspiration.

Here again the power of the Resurrection is seen in terms of the upgrading of lowly persons to an almost unimaginable level. He can understand the persuasive power of the apostles only in terms of a divine act, and the receptivity of the Greco-Roman world--exalted and humble alike--as a confirming sign of the risen Christ. This is the only way he can explain how they persuaded their hearers to expect rewards and recompenses after

death, suffering torture and hardship here and despising the material benefits of this world.

The capstone of his argument, which is an attempt to prove that the risen Christ was present in the lives and preaching of the apostles, is that the wisdom of the Greeks is against nature and the foolishness of the apostles is according to nature.

What is the natural course of things? That the weak shall be overcome by the strong, or the contrary? Those who speak easy things, or the more difficult sort of things? Those who attract men with dangers, or with security? Innovators of those who strengthen custom? Those who lead into a rough or a smooth way? Those who withdraw men from the institutions of their fathers, or those who lay down no strange laws? Those who promise all their good things after departing this world, or those who flatter in the present life? the few to overcome the man, or the many the few?

This extended question can have only one answer, but an ironic answer at best. Despite what would appear to be common sense, that the weak will be overcome by the strong, the innovator be silenced by the traditionalist, etc., the sheer facticity of the church as a real power in his world has convinced Chrysostom that ordinary logic is a failure. The Greek way is bankrupt, sterile and defeated. Conventional wisdom is shown to be fraudulent. Despite what human reason says is the truth of natural reality, in fact the weak, the innovator, those who made promises based on the life to come survived and triumphed over the strong, the traditionalist, and those who appeal to the promises of this life. The inference, based on the logic of a new dispensation, must be that the Christian way is kata phusin, the Greek way is anti phusin.

As I have already indicated, no other proof of the truth of the Resurrection is so convincing for Chrysostom as the seemingly miraculous elevation of the lowly of the world to a level of heroism par excellence.

As he says over and over, the foolishness of the fisherman has supplanted the wisdom of the philosopher, meaning that the kerygma of the Resurrection has surpassed Greek metaphysics. No longer can one argue the meaning of the human condition based on speculative arguments but on historical fact (the Resurrection as a historical event was not questioned by Chrysostom). One might say that rather than projecting one's wishes in the form of a pantheon of numinous ideas personified as gods, the very level of human existence has been raised to a heroic and sublime level. Reality is transformed. Christianity represents for our preacher a heroic level of consciousness into whose oceanic qualities one may plunge and find meaning through the removal of the fear of death. Life has meaning because death has been annihilated. What his apologia implies is that one no longer invests the rulers of this world (the wealthy, the powerful, the strong) with god-like qualities and in that investment arms oneself against the terror of existence. Instead, human life has been elevated and transformed by the Cross, so that Paul can claim this word from the Lord: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." (II Cor. 12:9)

This theme, that the weak and lowly are exalted and made strong by the Cross and the promise of the resurrection to come, finds modern expression in Ernest Becker, who writes of Christianity's greatest achievement:

. . . that it could take slaves, cripples, imbeciles, the simple and the mighty, and make them all secure heroes, simply by taking a step back from the world into another dimension of things, the dimension called heaven.¹⁸

¹⁸Ernest Becker, The Denial of Death (New York: Free Press, 1973), 229.

Here a modern scholar, an expert in depth psychology and its meaning, confirms Chrysostom's insight into the ennobling and energizing power of faith in the risen Christ. Whether this fact proves that 'now is Christ risen,' the fact I mean of the energizing of the Christian movement from defeat to victory and heroism, is not really the issue here. One is impressed, however, that Christianity did indeed expand with great rapidity in the midst of an extremely hostile cultural and political situation. The question of whether one explains that expansion of obvious spiritual power as a result of faith in a Christ who did in fact appear to the disciples (Did he appear to those who had faith, or was faith engendered in those to whom he appeared?), or by the power of a personality whose impress was so deep that his hypnotic qualities lived on in the being of the disciples long after Jesus' death, while not unimportant, cannot finally be answered. Nothing is impossible.

In any event, for Chrysostom it is clear that "the cross, though counted ignominious, became the author of innumerable blessings, and the foundation and root of glory unspeakable . . ." (XII, Homily 10, 54) Christians, therefore, are "worshippers of the cross . . ." (XII, Homily 12, 71) The Cross, it should be added, is never understood by Chrysostom apart from Resurrection. The power of the risen Christ (divine grace) was fully present in the crucified Jesus.

THE JOY OF RESURRECTION LIFE: (I COR. 5:8)

This homily (XV) is a meditation on the joy of life as a festive occasion, based on the text, "Let us celebrate the festival . . ." The

following quotation seems to encapsulate the meaning of the Christian life when viewed from the standpoint of eternity. The preacher says:

It is a festival, therefore, the whole time in which we live. For though he said, 'Let us keep the feast,' not with a view to the presence of the Passover or of Pentecost did he say it; but as pointing out that the whole of time is a festival unto Christians, because of the excellence of the good things which have been given. For what has not happened that is good? The Son of Man was made man for you. He freed you from death; and called you to a kingdom. . . Let no one then be downcast about poverty, and disease, and craft of enemies. For it is a festival, even the whole of our time. (XII, Homily 15, 86)

Chrysostom did not ignore the problems of poverty and disease. As a deacon in Antioch it had been his task to administer the social welfare program of the church, to care for widows and orphans, the sick and the lame and the blind and the blindingly poor. He knew the problems of human existence, and this is no empty rhetoric, full of good cheer but void of sincerity. Indeed, throughout his preaching career he attempted to help the rich rise above their possessions, to separate themselves from their wealth and aid those in need. Yet he knew that life does not end there. Equal distribution of wealth in and of itself will not bring joy. So he appealed to those who had fallen victim to the crushing reality of a diseased and poverty stricken existence to make 'our time,' meaning life on this earth, a festival. The objective basis of this ode to joy was simply the work of Christ who freed the faithful from death by means of his own death and Resurrection. Since this is true, and since one is called to a kingdom of excellence (the Church) and good things (the Mysteries), the Christian response must be one of joy in this life and hope in the next.

ON THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD: (I Cor. 6:14)

This homily is an attempt to prove the resurrection of the dead by appealing to the ancient doctrine of creatio ex nihilo. The argument is simply stated:

Let no one . . . go on disbelieving the resurrection: but if one disbelieve, let him think how many things He made from nothing and admit it as a proof also of the other. (XII, Homily 17, 97)

Chrysostom appeals to the creation of the earth and all that inhabit it. Creation teaches of the resurrection. The earth, indeed, was created for just that purpose, to teach us of the resurrection.

Why, for this cause the lifeless and senseless thing (the earth) was in the beginning made to put forth so many kinds of plants and irrational creatures, in order that from the very first He might instruct you in the doctrine of resurrection.

The lifeless earth, which put forth such an abundance of life, corresponds by analogy to the body which will be raised from the dead. Chrysostom is profoundly impressed with the creative power of God. A Being who could create something out of nothing--and no orthodox thinker would deny this doctrine--would have no trouble at all in raising a lifeless body. Chrysostom's understanding of the resurrection of the dead, not to mention Jesus, is nonsense without reference to the creative power of God, even as the world in his day was incomprehensible without reference to that same creativity. God was the cause of everything. He was the world's raison d'etre. Without God nothing, from the simplest natural process to the movement of the stars in the heavens, was possible. This was Chrysostom's world. In order to persuade his audience of the incomprehensibility of the created order and of the need for faith in a Creator who can raise men from the dead, the preacher raises a whole host

of questions which natural science could not answer at that time. He then asks, "Do you see into what an eddy the eye of your mind is plunged, unless you quickly take refuge in faith and the incomprehensible power of the Creator?" The only cure for lack of understanding is faith.

The preacher's appeal is essentially to the wonder of creation. He rightly intuits the ultimate incomprehensibility of the created order to the human mind. By inference, if human understanding is so limited, then why should one disbelieve something simply because he does not understand it? Does one disbelieve that glass is made from sand, to borrow one of his examples, simply because he does not understand the craft of glass making? So we hear the refrain: "Do not disbelieve the resurrection." This implies that one should not disbelieve it simply because one does not understand it. Certain things should be taken on faith, he seems to be saying, and one ought not inquire too closely into divine activity. Simply believe.

To the Greek mind of Paul's day, as well as Chrysostom's, the resurrection was foolishness because it did not fit the current dualistic anthropology, the soma/psyche viewpoint. Resurrection simply was not fashionable. All the world knew that the flesh is corrupt and will deservedly decay and return to the earth. Only the soul is immortal because it is pure. If death is release from the prison of the body, what sense could resurrection make? It is not logical. Yet for Paul and Chrysostom who followed him faith demands an expansion of the mind into the utterly fantastic world of unconventional wisdom, the preaching of the Cross and resurrection of the body. Trustingly, as it were, one

lets loose of Reason and surrenders to Truth. This seems to be the force of his refrain: "Do not disbelieve the resurrection."

HOMILIES ON I CORINTHIANS 15

Chrysostom's commentary on this chapter consists of five homilies, XXXVIII through XLII. He understands the order of Paul's discourse on the Resurrection (its place in the epistle) to mean that Paul placed it last because it is first in importance. It is "the very sum of all good things." (XII, Homily XXXVIII, 226) As the summum bonum it is all our hope. Paul, he says, "put this head [subject] after the rest, both because it was extremely necessary and because it involves the whole of our condition." The Resurrection is an ontological necessity. The very being of the church is at stake in this doctrine. That is why he can say that the sum of the gospel is "God having become man and having been crucified and having risen again." This is an interesting idea, since it implies that God himself was crucified, a doctrine that the orthodox party passionately denied. Unless I have misunderstood the mood of orthodox theology, both East and West, the idea of a crucified or suffering God was simply untenable, although the logos doctrine, i.e. incarnational theology, leads one in that direction.

It becomes apparent in his discussion of verses 1-11 that Chrysostom has a theological axe to grind. He quickly joins with his combatants, the Manichees. It is apparent from the start of this discourse that just as Paul was defending his teaching against those who say there is no resurrection of the dead (verse 12), so is Chrysostom defending his own party's interpretation of this doctrine against the

interpretation of the Manichees. He tells us that the Manichees understand the meaning of Christ's death not as bodily death (he was a man in appearance only), but as the death of sin. When Paul wrote that Christ died for our sins the Manichees took this to mean one's being in sin: "By death here, they say, Paul means nothing else than our being in sin; and by resurrection, our being delivered from our sins." This teaching, of course, effectively denies the bodily death and burial and Resurrection of Christ, not to mention the resurrection of the body in the future. Chrysostom, on the other hand, is adamant in his claim that Christ had a body and that his death was a somatic death, which he defines as a death of the flesh. That body of flesh and blood died and was buried and was raised from the dead. The same can be said of Christians who one day will die and be raised in the flesh. Chrysostom is defending resurrection of the flesh.

Paul does not say, of course, that the body of Christ died, was buried and was raised from the dead. To the Jew one does not have a body but is a body. Apart from Hellenistic influence on Palestinian Judaism of the first century, by and large the Jews held to the notion of the fundamental unity of soul and body, as opposed to the dualism of the Greeks, a fact I have already pointed out. Chrysostom, who was raised a Greek and was a product of the best of Greek education, is having the same problem interpreting this doctrine as Paul did. Because of his own cultural situation, given the kind of opponent he was combatting, he interprets the resurrection in terms of resurrection of the flesh, which is really a defense of the human body. Christian orthodoxy had to have a resurrection of the body in order to circumvent the idea of the

inherent evil of the flesh. Becker¹⁹ has shown that historically the human body has been a problem to be solved, because it is subject to decay and death. Christianity elevated the body to an exalted position (this is my own view) as the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit, which early on was practically coextensive with the spirit of the risen Christ (that the idea of 'spirit' of Christ and bodily resurrection of the flesh is a contradiction in terms is self evident). The body was no longer of the earth but a heavenly temple of the spirit, to be raised up and transformed in the end. That is how Paul and the church overcame the loss which is inherent in nature ("Time is perpetually perishing.").

In Chrysostom's day all the intellectual world knew that the body was a prison from which the soul escaped at death. Plato reinterpreted reigned supremely. The task of the apologete was to dethrone the ruling power and substitute a new understanding of immortality. In this case it meant convincing the world of the truth of the resurrection of the flesh. To preach this doctrine was to carry bad tidings. This task called for an entirely new conceptual framework, which presented tremendous problems of Christian interpretation. An essentially Jewish notion had to be couched in terms which were persuasive of the Greek mind.

In any event, to continue our discussion of the problem of the body, it is clear that to say that Christ died and was buried and was raised from the dead certainly implies that something happened to his body. Or more exactly, Christ did exist in bodily form; he was not a man in appearance only. One does not bury a phantasm. Paul evidently

¹⁹ Ibid.

intended to say that the Christ who is a body (a real human being) did really die and was buried and that body/person was raised from the dead in bodily form. The problem with resurrection of the flesh lies in a misunderstanding of the word σῶμα. For Chrysostom to be raised in a body is to be raised in the flesh. That was not necessarily true for Paul. Willi Marxsen has written:

Paul speaks of σῶμα, a word generally translated as 'body.' When we use the word body, we generally understand by it the flesh which decays in the earth. But Paul uses σῶμα to mean identity of the personality before and after death. Those who rise are the same as those who were alive. It is the same 'I,' as it were.²⁰

In line with the orthodox view of 'resurrection of the flesh,' (cf., e.g., The Apostles Creed), Chrysostom understands the word body the way we understand it, as the flesh which decays in the ground. Consequently, he misunderstands Paul, or less likely intentionally misrepresents him, to prove the doctrine of the resurrection of the body/flesh. Chrysostom honestly believes that the resurrection of the body means the resurrection of the flesh, a notion that is not supported but denied by Paul (I Cor. 15:50). Chrysostom understands the saying 'that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God' to mean a judgment on immorality ("for by flesh he here denotes men's evil deeds, . ." XII, Homily 52, 256). Paul said this, according to our interpreter, in order to show us that evil deeds do not lead to the kingdom. This is little more than anagogic reasoning which discovers moral implications in a text which contradicts one's presuppositions. Flesh is simply that which is subject to decay, and it will be transformed.

²⁰ Willi Marxsen, The Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), 69.

Chrysostom's homilies on I Corinthians 15 lead one to believe, as I said, that he had a position to defend. He had to defend the notion of the resurrection of the body/flesh against the Manichean belief in the corruption of flesh and the idea that it simply meant deliverance from sin at Baptism. This became a constraining force on the hermeneutics of our author and got in the way of understanding in terms of objective valuation of the text. Throughout his discourses on Paul he defended this interpretation as the only viable way to comprehend the meaning of the resurrection of the dead. Dogmatic exegesis has always so limited understanding.

Our review of the preaching of John Chrysostom has shown that the Resurrection was an important part of his proclamation. The theological rationale for preaching the Resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of Christians was that these doctrines needed to be defended against heterodox interpretations. Thus his method of preaching was decidedly apologetic. This is not surprising, given the history of the period. History teaches that the orthodox center held for many centuries.

THE WORD OF GOD

We may summarize in brief Chrysostom's view of the meaning of the apostolic preaching of the death and Resurrection of Christ. Christ's work on the Cross was to take away sin. The almighty condescended to die in order to bless humanity by overcoming the consequences of human sin, which are death and all the other ills that flesh is heir to. Rather than shame and weakness, the Cross represents an act of divine power. The risen Christ was fully present in the crucified Jesus, who

avored humanity by dying in our place. Christ's Resurrection released humanity from death itself. It is the sign and seal of death's destruction. Christ's atoning death as an act of divine reconciliation and his Resurrection as a token of immortality are predicated on the conviction that Christ raised himself from the dead. He intended to raise himself from the dead in order to release humankind from the pangs of death. One's response to this divine favor should simply be joy in this life and hope in the next. That is the sum and substance of his preaching on the Resurrection.

Chrysostom's homiletical style reflected the mood of Antiochene exegesis whose thrust was first of all to seek the precise meaning of the text as it is written. This exegetical principle suggests that Christian interpretation of biblical passages should begin with the literal meaning of the text at hand. Furthermore, this principle suggests that the student of preaching should be familiar with the original languages of Scripture. In addition, Chrysostom's use of rhetoric is suggestive of the power of persuasion, when it is understood in the sense of conviction and not of manipulation. Persuasive language, when it is in service to the Word of God, is rich in suggestion and is not an attempt to think for the hearer or to manipulate the emotions. Preaching, therefore, should point to a deeper dimension of reality, namely, faith in the purposes of the divine life as they are manifested in the life and teachings, death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Finally, the preaching of John Chrysostom was incarnational, which means that it was a real attempt to combine the Word of God with human speech. Preaching may be

seen as an attempt to release the power of the divine logos in the present moment by actualizing that life-giving and life-changing reality. In short, the sermon as human word participates organically in the divine speech in order to reveal the love of God.

Chapter 4

BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX: DOCTOR OF LOVE

THE MEANING OF RESURRECTION

St. Bernard, the Cistercian monk who was abbot of the twelfth century monastery at Clairvaux, probably did not write "Jesus, the Very Thought of Thee." It is, however, characteristic of his passionate love of the Word of God incarnate, which concept is the root metaphor of his allegorical system of theological exegesis.

Jesus, the very thought of thee with sweetness fills my breast;
But sweeter far thy face to see, And in thy presence rest.

It was rest, that is the inward repose of mystic contemplation, that Bernard sought beyond all other qualities of the spiritual life.

Margaret Deanesly quotes from the same hymn a stanza which I had never seen.

When oncethou visitest the heart, then truth begins to¹shine;
The earthly vanities depart, then kindles love divine.

One may state at the outset that this hymn represents the meaning of the Resurrection according to Bernard. Not only is it the inner tranquility of the heart and soul which are absorbed by mystical contemplation of the face of Jesus, but it is also the indwelling spirit of the risen Christ which kindles the warmth of divine affection in the human breast. Resurrection is perfection of love in the human soul.

¹Margaret Deanesly, A History of the Medieval Church (London: Methuen, 1962), 122.

In all that I have read Bernard has very little to say explicitly about our subject. What I have to say, therefore, will be by way of what is implied in the material to be examined. We seek the sense of it all in the ecstatic and visionary language of a true mystic, who is by definition one who has attained intuitive and immediate knowledge of the divine life. What I want to demonstrate is that at the center of Bernard's reflections on the love of God is a vision of the risen Christ who transforms the human heart by perfecting the soul in love. This transformation, from the cold and lifeless death of a sinful existence to a life which radiates the passion of divine love, is how Bernard understands Resurrection in terms of its relation to the Christian life. He contemplates being raised from the death of sin into a life of loving service, and he analyzes human existence from that standpoint. That is to say, in terms of ethics life ought to be in contemplation of the love of God in Christ and in service to one's neighbor. Bernard's view is what is sometimes called a 'cruciform' understanding of human existence.

The point we are making on the meaning of Resurrection is well illustrated by a sermon called "In tempore resurrectionis." In trying to solve the hermeneutical problem of how the Jesus who died and was raised can still be alive today and lay claim to human life, Bernard affirms that he lives in one's heart by faith. This means "that Christ lives in us as long as faith does; when faith dies, however, then in a sense Christ also dies in us."² Now the sign of faith is works of

²Bernard of Clairvaux, St. Bernard On the Christian Year (London: Mowbray, 1959), 93.

charity. Deeds of love and mercy "bear witness to our faith's aliveness, just as movements of the body show that the body lives."³ Charity is to faith as the soul is to the body:

. . . when charity grows cold, faith dies, just as the body dies when the soul departs from it.³

As the soul (anima) is the animating source of the body's aliveness, so is charity the wellspring of the life of faith. We can see in passing that Bernard accepts the soma/psyche dichotomy of Greek anthropology and is heir to the platonic definition of death as separation of the soul from the body.

HERMENEUTIC OF HISTORY

From what has been said about his understanding of the meaning of Resurrection, it would seem that Bernard interprets human history in light of the Christ event. In a sermon called "In die sancto paschae" Bernard's hermeneutic of history is express in terms of the events of Good Friday through Easter Sunday. Bernard writes:

The Lord did not defer his resurrection beyond the third day, that the prophet's saying might be verified, 'After two days he will revive us, in the third day he will raise us up.' (Hosea 6:2) . . . He redeemed mankind upon the cross on the sixth day, the same in which he created man in the beginning. The following day he kept his sabbath in the tomb, having finished the work that he had undertaken. But on the third, that is the first of days, then the new man, the conqueror of death, the first fruits of them that sleep, appeared.⁴

³Ibid., 94.

⁴Ibid., 91.

Please note that the act of creation is correlated with the saving efficacy of the cross. The saving love of God which is seen in the victory of Christ over death is understood in terms of a second act of creation. The world which was first made new by the Creator is renewed by that same creative power. It is interesting to speculate that Bernard intends to say that the work of Christ on the cross is coextensive with the work of the Creator. There is an integral relationship between these two acts of power. The Lord who created the heavens and the earth also created salvation in the paschal event. Human redemption is coequal with human creation. Paradise may yet be regained.

If human history may be understood as reflecting the schema of salvation which is signified in the passion of Christ, then "our day" is the time of crucifixion. "We" are indeed on the cross waiting to die:

Let us listen to nobody, brethren, not to flesh and blood, nor to any spirit, that wants to persuade us to come down from the cross. Let us stay on the cross, let us die on the cross.⁵

In this quotation we can see that Jesus' admonition to his disciples, that they complete his suffering and death, is taken quite seriously by our Christian brother. Not only must one take up the cross and follow Jesus, one is in fact already on the cross, sharing the suffering of Christ and thereby grasping the meaning of life. Of course, Bernard is addressing a 12th century monastic community, which by and large was more receptive to such a message than are ordinary folk. Still in all, it is an interesting way of thinking about Christian discipleship. Bernard goes on to say that one awaits the coming of death as sleep,

⁵Ibid., 92.

then will come the final act of consummation through the resurrection of the dead when everyone will be perfected or completed in love. This last point, of perfection through resurrection, is central to Bernard's understanding of the doctrine of sanctification, as we shall see later on.

Bernard elaborates on his understanding of the crucifixion and resurrection. "Our day" is the first day, the day of crucifixion. At day's end "we" shall rest in the grave, that is on the second day. On the third day Christ will raise "our bodies" and recreate them in the glorious image of God. The imago dei, which was soiled and obscured by sin, will be restored at the day of resurrection. In a sense, the work of Christ will be to restore humankind to its former state of perfection when the divine image was perfectly reflected in everything that man did and was. At that time the schism in the human soul, the splitting off of one's true nature, will be healed. Humanity will be complete, perfectly reflecting the glorious image and likeness of the divine life which is perfect love. Depth psychology could spend a great deal of time contemplating this profound analysis of the human condition, I mean Bernard's understanding of spiritual schizophrenia.

Bernard puts it this way. Those who are on the cross wait so that

when the day of the cross has been manfully brought to its end, we may rest sweetly on the second day, that follows on our death, and sleep happily in our graves, looking for the blessed hope and the coming of the glory of God, who on the third day will raise our bodies at last, in the likeness of the body of his glory.⁶

⁶Ibid., 92.

this latter phrase is literal, not metaphorical. Bernard believes in somatic life after death, that is the resurrection of the body. There is no perfection of the soul outside the body, even though it is the soul which rests without a body during the second day, an interim period between death and resurrection. The phrase 'in the likeness of the body of his glory' seems to mean that he believes one will be "recreated" in the image or likeness of the body of the exalted Jesus. This is no doubt an allusion to I Cor. 15:42-45, which discusses spiritual and physical bodies. Paul was concerned with the transformation of mortal, corruptible and lacklustre bodies into immortal, incorruptible and glorious bodies whose radiance outshines the earthly as the sun outshines the stars.

Bernard turns from metaphysical concerns to more mundane affairs when he discusses the meaning of Jesus' Pasch. The exalted Jesus invites one to follow him to Galilee (Mark 14:28), whose spiritual meaning is newness of life:

If, after his death on the cross, the Lord Christ had lived again under the conditions of this our mortality and amid all the troubles of this present life, I should have said not that he passed on, but that he had come back, not that he had passed over, but that he had returned to his former state. But now, because he has in fact 'passed over' into newness of life, he invites us also to 'pass over,' calls us to Galilee.⁷

To 'pass over,' then, is to live a life of repentance, purity and renewal. By sharing in the sufferings of Christ by "being planted with him in the baptism of tears, repentance and confession," one has died to sin. Having died to sin, how can one go back to the old way of life? That would be

⁷Ibid., 92-93.

like Christ's living again 'under the conditions of this our mortality and amid all the troubles of this present life.' As Christ has gone on or 'passed over' into a life of glory and immortality, so must one 'pass over' into that newness of life which is symbolized by Jesus' death and Resurrection. Jesus invites the believer to Galilee and one must follow. Once one is on the road to newness of life, there is no turning back.

We have seen that for Bernard resurrection is perfection of love in the human soul. It is Christ alive in the faithful empowering them by faith to carry out deeds of love and mercy. Resurrection of the soul is both figurative and literal. It is literal insofar as one day they will be "recreated" in the divine image and likeness at the moment of resurrection. It is figurative in that today they are offered the new life which the Resurrection of Jesus signifies. That is to say, resurrection has both a realized and an eschatological dimension, it is both present and future. It represents life in the present and the life to come.

SERMONS ON THE SONG OF SONGS

You may recall that earlier I stated that much of what Bernard has to say on our subject comes by way of implication. This is especially true of his commentary on the Song of Solomon. Bernard assumes the Resurrection. He does not attempt to defend it. We can assume that his hearers, being members of his own community, were themselves believers in the Resurrection and the resurrection. They did not deny its truth, nor did they deny its claim on them as servants of the new life which the

Resurrection signifies. In this friendly atmosphere Bernard is freer than most preachers have been to develop his position without having to defend himself or his beliefs and ideas.

Since, as we have seen, Resurrection is the perfection of love in the human soul, then these sermons are really about the Resurrection life. The purpose of Bernard's preaching was to restore the human soul to its former glory by raising it up out of the mire which bogs it down, a form of debasement which resulted from original sin. Bernard's spiritual program had as its purpose, according to C. Halfants,

to direct man's love to God; to restore with the help of God's grace a twisted power which clings unduly to creatures, in order that once freed it may find the dignity of its origin.⁸

Bernard evidently believed that with God's help it was possible to achieve the restoration of the soul on this earth by way of the monastic life. He saw that the soul must seek God by means of a movement of love in faith. This love is to be directed towards the humanity of Jesus, with a special concern shown for his Passion and triumph over death. One attempts to return to God, that is restore the image and likeness of God, by the practice of virtue, obedience, penance, and charity. These qualities of the monastic life are thwarted by concupiscence, a concept which he evidently borrowed from Augustine. The restoration of charity or love is equal to the recovery of full liberty and the perfect restoration of the imago dei in the soul. The agency of the soul's return to God is the Word of God incarnate, whose distorted likeness man bears

⁸ Bernard of Clairvaux, St. Bernard On the Song of Songs, (Spencer, MA: Cistercian, 1971), ix. All subsequent references are given as paragraph and page number.

within himself. Love is the driving power of the soul. Love restores the divine likeness. Love unifies God and man in one spirit of perfect harmony. Love raises one from the death of sin and unites one's heart with God. Here we can see that the Manichaeian notion of resurrection from sin has influenced the mind of Bernard (cf. Wesley below).

The first sermon is a reflection on the title of the book. The preacher compares the 'Song of Songs' with a loaf of bread to be broken and shared. The purpose of preaching is to share the Lord with the hearer. Bernard recognizes the significance of Luke 24:36, in which it is said that 'Jesus was known to them in the breaking of the bread.' Figuratively speaking, Jesus may be made known by the breaking and sharing of the bread of Scripture. This may mean that Luke's vision of the risen Christ as an interpretive presence among the congregation rests on the foundation of preaching as the sharing of the bread of life. For it is the Lord himself who breaks the bread and shares it with the congregation. "But who," the preacher asks, "is going to divide this loaf? The master of the house is present, it is the Lord you must see in the breaking of the bread." (I: 4)

Bernard's view of the task of Christian interpretation is in line with the mood of his time: to seek the hidden meaning of the text (I: 5). For him the spirit of the text is more important than its literal meaning, which allows him to say that the purpose of the Canticle is to "celebrate the praises of Christ and his church, the gift of holy love, the sacrament of endless union with God." (I: 9) In order to develop this theme he characterizes life without God as a combat zone by appealing to the personal experience of his hearers. But must

one agree that "man's life on earth is a ceaseless warfare?" This idea is illustrative of Bernard's psychological disposition. Life is a battlefield on which one is engaged in a ceaseless struggle against evil. The soul, or Christ on behalf of the soul, is locked in mortal combat against the powers and principalities that be. Bernard places the vision of the Canticle, a vision which guides and directs man towards perfection, over against this rather pessimistic understanding of human existence. The Song of Songs "is preeminently a marriage song telling of chaste souls in loving embrace, of their wills in sweet accord, of the mutual exchange of the heart's affections." (I: 11) Yet this would seem to be a vision of the future, not a presently realizable state. The soul, which is locked in this body of flesh, is offered the promise of sweet communion with the risen Lord sometime in the future. At best the soul on earth must accept penultimate not final perfection. This vision of what is to be is a source of encouragement and strength to the soul which is locked up in this body of death. When the soul emerges triumphant at the end of time it will have achieved that perfection of mind, will and affections which only the risen and exalted Jesus is capable of bestowing. In the meantime the struggle goes on.

In sermon five Bernard defines the soul as that which gives life to the body. It is important to understand his view of the relation of spirit and matter in order to see how he will solve the problem of immortality.

The first thing to be said is that spirit is expressed in four orders of being: animal, humankind, angel, and God. The spirit is equal to the life principle. Of the four, only God does not have need of a body. But can the spirit exist without a body?

If we consider the animal we see that its spirit, its life principle, cannot even exist without a body. When the animal dies its soul ceases to live at the same moment that it ceases to impart life. We indeed continue to live after the body's death, but only by means of the body do we gain those merits that lead to a life of blessedness. (V: 1)

This is somewhat hard to understand, but the meaning seems to be that life is impossible without form, even life after death. That is, the soul may well live on after it separates from this present body, but in order to be of any use it must once again inhabit a body. This almost sounds like "reincarnation," and in a sense it is, but "reincarnation" into a spiritual body in heaven, not on earth. As for the latter term, the body is useful to the spirit on earth in order to render service to others and thereby gain merit in this life and blessedness in the next. The importance of the human body is that "without it the soul can act neither for its own advantage nor for the benefit of others." (V: 5) The purpose of the body is to serve and be served, here and in heaven.

Furthermore, Bernard seems to imply that there are three stages to human existence. The first stage is one's present bodily life on earth. The second stage revolves around the idea of death as separation of the soul from the body, a kind of interim period before the resurrection of the body. Resurrection, which is the third stage of existence, will involve as I intimated a kind of "reincarnation" whereby the soul is reunited with a body of inestimable value and unlike the present body in that it will not be subject to the qualities of aging, disease and death. It will be, as Paul said, immortal, incorruptible, and beyond change.

It is clear in this sermon, and the one that follows it, that Bernard has an animistic view of biological functioning, almost

Aristotelian. In fact, Aristotle taught that the soul "is the cause of bodily formation and motion, a cause acting from ends; itself incorporeal, it is yet actual or real only as the power moving and controlling the body."⁹ Bernard would deny that the soul does not exist in and of itself outside the body, but as the discussion above tried to show, it is not of much use without corporeal form. The soul needs the body as much as the body needs the soul. In any event, it is clear that there is an animating life force that imparts motion to every creature. Only the human soul, however, is immortal. By analogy it would seem that God, while having no need for a body, is a kind of world soul who imparts life to creation as the being of all living things. But even though God has no need of corporeality (VI: 1), in order to show humanity who he is and what he has done, God took bodily form.

During the Incarnation, God manifested his creative power through miraculous deeds. "In the body . . . and through the body, he performed wonderful deeds with an authority that was obvious." (VI: 3) This point is important for our discussion by implication. God took bodily form in the human Jesus, then departed from Jesus when he died and was reunited with him when he was raised from the dead. That is, the divine spirit was the animating power in the human Jesus, his soul, as it were. It follows that God the Savior continues to exist in bodily form as the Christ. Where does Christ reside? In the church. It is not unreasonable to assume that the divine life resides in the church. Christ and

⁹Wilhelm Windelband, A History of Philosophy (New York: Macmillan, 1901; New York: Harper & Row, 1958), I, 149.

the church, according to Bernard's interpretation of the Cantic, have been joined together in a spiritual marriage. Bridegroom and Bride are one. The church is the "reincarnation" of the risen Jesus. The church is the Body of Christ.

In sermons eleven and twelve, Bernard elaborates on his understanding of the Incarnation, both past and present. The eleventh sermon on the Cantic is a meditation on the shame of the Cross, based on the idea of kenosis in Philippians 2. Here the preacher tells us why God took bodily form and how this divine condescension points the way to exaltation or perfection of the soul. In sermon twelve we see the idea which was expressed above made more explicit, the notion that the Christian church is the "reincarnation" of the crucified and risen one. The church is the body and soul of the Savior "represented," and ministers to the world in his place by manifesting the qualities of charity and obedience to God. This is the church's divine calling, to act in Christ's place.

In the second chapter of Philippians Paul is speaking of humility among Christians, of counting others better than oneself. This fact is not lost on Bernard. He sees in Christ's self-sacrifice an example of humility par excellence:

Who is there that can adequately gauge the greatness of the humility, gentleness, self-surrender, revealed by the Lord of majesty in assuming human nature, in accepting the punishment of death, the shame of the cross? (XI: 7)

But why would God submit to such indignity and suffering? God desired to submit to human misery in order that he might know it as we know it. God wanted to experience it by becoming human. Etienne Gilson has this to say on the subject of the suffering of God:

That is why this impassible God abased himself to suffering; taking the form of a servant, he put our misery and subjection to the proof, that he might put mercy and obedience to the proof; obedience in submission, human misery in his passion.¹⁰

Bernard continues:

For, more obvious than the light of day is the immense sacrifice he has made for you, o man; he who was Lord became a slave, he who was rich became a pauper, the Word was made flesh, and the Son of God did not disdain to become the son of man. So may it please you to remember that, even if made out of nothing, you have not been redeemed out of nothing. (XI: 7)

I will mention only in passing that here Paul is interpreted in terms of the Johannine doctrine of the Incarnation and that again, as we saw in the first section of this chapter, creation is correlated with redemption as a kind of second act of creation. More to the point at hand is Bernard's expression of the monastic ideal. Since the impassible God, in taking human form, has himself experienced human misery, then the way of Jesus is the way of suffering love. Jesus the son of man evidenced the qualities of humility, gentleness and self-surrender to serve as a model of monastic behavior. Jesus, the perfect monk, is one's example and guide. One ought to follow his example by imitating him in his suffering. In imitating Jesus one should manifest those same qualities of humility, gentleness and self-surrender. Personal suffering, a life of suffering for Jesus' sake, is the way to liberate the soul from this body of death. It is at once the way of crucifixion and resurrection. In a sense, then, the task of the true Christian is the task of the true philosopher according to Plato: to practice dying, i.e., to free the soul from the body (see the *Phaedo*).

¹⁰ Etienne Gilson, The Mystical Theology of Saint Bernard (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1940), 77.

If the church is the living Body of Christ on earth, a 'reincarnation' of his soul, as it were, then it is the place where the human soul achieves communion with the living Christ. This is the sacramental quality of ecclesiastical life, that the church is an outward and visible representation of the crucified and risen One. Members of Christ's Body live in spiritual communion with Christ and in harmony with each other.

The twelfth sermon contains a meditation on Mark 16:1, which speaks of the women bringing spices to go and anoint the body of Jesus. This homily is really the abbot's instructions on the care of the church, that is, it is a treatise on pastoral care.

According to the preacher's allegorical interpretation God has prepared a special ointment for the church as the Body of Christ. Here is how he understands the text:

They buy spices not ointments; the ointment for his body was not bought ready made, a totally new one was prepared; and not for application merely to a part of his body such as the feet or the head, but . . . to cover his whole body, not any particular part.
(XII: 6)

He assumes that Jesus' body was not anointed at burial because, when the women got to the tomb, it was already empty. One might say, therefore, that his corpse was not anointed because he did not allow it to be. Instead, Jesus had something else in mind, his living body, the church. He did not allow his dead body to be anointed in order that his living body might be covered with a special ointment, one might say an ointment not made by human hands. This, we are told, is the ointment of loving-kindness and compassion (XII: 1) with which the living body of Jesus is to be covered. This is the sacred responsibility of those who are called to serve the church:

It will thus be clear that you abound with the best ointments, that you have undertaken to care . . . for his whole body which is the Church. It was perhaps for this reason the Lord Jesus would not allow the mixture of spices to be used on his dead body, he wished to reserve it for his living body. For that church which eats the living bread which has come down from heaven is alive: she is the more precious body of Christ that was not to taste death's bitterness, whereas every Christian knows that his other body did suffer death. His will is that she be anointed, that she be cared for, that her sick members be restored to health with remedies that are the fruit of diligence. It was for her that he withheld these precious ointments, when, anticipating the hour and hastening the glory of his resurrection, he eluded the women's devout purpose only to give it a new direction. (XII: 7)

This is nothing less than a vision of the resurrected Christ in the living body of Jesus. Bernard does not say this explicitly, but it is the pervasive implication of his discussion. He does say that the relation of soul and body is analogous to bride and bridegroom. Now the bride is a type of the church (" . . . the bride is the church." XIV: 7), and the bridegroom is a type of Christ (XIV: 8). For Bernard, therefore, as the soul is to the body, so is Christ to the church. The soul, as we have seen, is the animating, energizing principle, created in the image and likeness of God, which resides in the body and seeks the body's salvation. In like manner, the risen Christ resides in the church as the agent of its salvation. Of course, according to orthodoxy Christ was not created in the image of God but is the image of God, or the Word made flesh. It seems clear, in any event, that what Bernard has in mind in his reflection on the sacramental qualities of the Christian life is a vision of the risen and exalted Jesus who carries on his works of charity in his living body, the church. That is how he has given 'the women's devout purpose . . . a new direction.'

I have been arguing that for Bernard the meaning of Resurrection is the life-giving power of God to restore the human soul to its original

form and likeness, that is to raise it out of the mire of natural existence and exalt it by transforming it from death to new life. The place where this happens is the church which itself is the living body whose soul is Christ risen from the dead. What is the church? It is the place where the Word is preached and received in faith. This is how the soul is revived, by hearing and experiencing the Word of God:

Now the Word is heard, now it is experienced, and it is clear that . . . he bears no empty name. As men feel the infusion of spiritual health they refuse to conceal their good fortune. The inward experience finds outward expression . . . But see! I am conscious! I am alive! I am perfectly restored, my resurrection is complete. What else is the death of the body than to be deprived of life and feeling? Sin, which is the death of the soul, took from me the feelings of compunction, hushed my prayers of praise; I was dead. Then he who forgives sin came down, restored my senses again . . . Why wonder that death should yield when he who is life comes down? (XV: 8)

Resurrection, then, is an acoustical affair (to paraphrase Luther); it comes by means of hearing the Word, that is by preaching. The Word is Christ, the heavenly Word of God, who comes down to bring new life to the soul dead with sin. Christ condescends and favors the soul with his life-giving spirit. Sin is death of the soul. It kills all life and feeling. The Word is experienced inwardly and, as a sign of renewal, the soul is made alive and animates the body, giving back to the body life and feeling. This is a powerful description of the significance of the Resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of the dead in Christ, as spiritual resurrection of both soul and body.

Bernard has virtually reduced the meaning of resurrection to an inward experience as an infusion of feeling. While he would not deny the objective quality of the resurrection event, nevertheless what we are left with is a state of inward consciousness which is expressed in

terms of a revived soul. Viewed from a psychological standpoint, that is a miracle in itself. Who can deny the moving testimony of one who cried: 'I am conscious! I am alive!' His interpretation of such an experience is open to question, however. It may be true that renewal or spiritual rebirth is best understood in terms of the resurrection of the dead. The problem is that of mysticism generally. We are left with little more than a powerful description of an inward state of consciousness. Is that all there is?

DE DILIGENDO DEO

We turn now to Bernard's well known treatment of the love of God. God has the power to raise the soul from the dead and perfect it through love by drawing it up to the highest level of existence imaginable, where one does not even love oneself except for the love of God. That is the central message of his homily on divine love and human perfection. By virtue of the discussion of the preceding section of this paper, it seems clear that the preacher is reflecting on his own miraculous resurrection, whereby his spirit received a seemingly miraculous infusion of vitality and health: he was dead but now he is alive! This new form of self-awareness was described in terms of a complete restoration of both soul and body, i.e., of the whole person. But the question that has to be raised, both from a psychological and a pneumatological standpoint (assuming, of course, that he is expressing something about the doctrine of sanctification), is whether or not it is possible to achieve perfection of love on this side of the resurrection. The discussion will show that Bernard himself struggled with this question.

One point needs to be made in advance, however. Even though God has the power to raise the soul from death in sin and restore its loving nature by "re-creating" it in the image of God, the real miracle is love itself. It is that God, who is invisible and inaccessible (see, e.g., the thirteenth sermon on the Canticle), becomes visible and accessible through deeds of love. For Bernard, then, the miracle of love is that God empowers those who love him to love and is thereby made manifest. God's nature is love. Therefore, by "his own nature, . . . , he becomes somehow visible and a source of wonder in the lives of those who love him." (XIII: 6)

Having said that, let us move into a discussion of Bernard's hermeneutic of love, on degrees of love and human perfectibility. Please recall that I am using two translations of the primary text: T. L. Connolly's St. Bernard on the Love of God¹¹ and Hugh Martin's On Loving God.¹²

The relevant material is found in chapters VIII, IX and X of the text. Chapter VIII is on the first degree of love, whereby one loves oneself for one's own sake. Chapter IX treats the second and third degrees of love. Chapter X speaks of the fourth or highest degree, when one does not love even oneself except for the sake of God.

The fourth degree of love means "that in saints every human affection will then in some ineffable manner melt away from self and be

¹¹Bernard of Clairvaux, St. Bernard on the Love of God, ed. and trans. Terence L. Connolly (Techny, Ill: Mission Press, 1943).

¹²Bernard of Clairvaux, On Loving God, ed. and trans. Hugh Martin (London: SCM Press, 1959).

entirely transfused into the will of God."¹³ This, according to our interpreter, fulfills the requirement of I Corinthians 15:28, that God may be all in all. That requirement involves the total transformation of human nature and identity: the human substance will remain but in another form, another glory and another power. An examination of the text shows that I Corinthians 15:28 summarizes the section on subjection of all creation to the will of God. It begins with the affirmation that Christ, the first-fruits of the harvest of the dead, has been raised from the dead (verse 20). Then follows the order of final events, ending with the subjection of all things, including the Son. Clearly Bernard understands the transformation of human affection in love of even one-self for the sake of God to be a form of final subjection to God. That is to say, at the resurrection human will and affection will be subject to God's rule. Now one has free will and affection. At that time human will and affection will be subsumed under the "pantocratic" rule of God's eternal will and affection. God will then rule over all, even the human heart and mind. If the last enemy to be destroyed is death (verse 26), one might say, then the last subject to be subjugated is the human heart.

According to Bernard, the process of being perfected in love is a process beginning with the physical (carnal) and moving through stages or degrees to the spiritual level. The first degree is that one loves oneself for one's own sake (the level of carnality). Having recognized one's need for something better to love, one proceeds to love God for one's own sake, which is the second stage. The third degree is achieved

¹³Bernard, St. Bernard On the Love of God, 39.

when one loves God for God's sake and not one's own sake. The final or spiritual level is reached when one does not love even oneself except for the sake of God. At this level the physical or carnal level has been totally transcended.

One has to ask: is it possible to arrive at the fourth degree while still in the flesh? Bernard's answer is ambiguous. Given his belief in the omnipotence of God, he would not want to say that anything is impossible for the deity. He concludes his discussion of the fourth degree in this manner:

And so, in a spiritual and immortal body, in a body perfect, calm and acceptable, and in all things subject to the spirit, let the soul hope to apprehend the fourth degree of love, or rather to be apprehended in it; for, in truth, it is within the power of God to give it to whomsoever he wishes, not for human diligence to procure by its own efforts.¹⁴

This leaves the door of possibility wide open.

Bernard's argument, that divine perfection of the soul has its beginning in the flesh (the carnal love of the first level), in combination with his discussion of a spiritual and immortal body, makes it clear that he is alluding to the resurrection body of I Corinthians 15: 44. In that text Paul discusses the transformation of the physical body into a spiritual body. Analogously, according to this interpreter, one moves through the degrees of perfection from physical or carnal love to spiritual love as one moves farther and farther above the quantum mass of the earthly body. Bernard seems to believe that, although it may be impossible to achieve the fourth degree on earth, the power of God to transform human nature is not restricted by what seems to be

¹⁴Ibid.

impossible. If God so willed it, the human body could achieve that state wherein one could be grasped or apprehended by the highest degree of love. If the Latin word translated as 'apprehend' has the same primary meaning as its English counterpart, then the fourth degree might be realizable as a kind of intuitive understanding or perception. In any event, to realize the final degree of love would be to arrive at a plane of existence in which one is no longer weighed down by the pressing necessities of the flesh, either by the qualities of cupidity or concupiscence, but is transported to the realm of pure spiritual existence. It would be, to echo Paul's ecstatic mood (cf. II Corinthians 12:2), to be seized or caught up ('apprehended') to the third heaven, but assuredly in the body!

At this point it would not be inappropriate to discuss the meaning of salvation from another perspective, that of "The Steps of Humility." In his introduction, G. B. Burch argues that the subject of De gradibus humilitatis and De diligendo deo is the same, how to find God. Bernard simply has two audiences in mind. "On Loving God" was written for eremetical monks, the Carthusians of Chartreuse, and "Steps of Humility" for cenobitical monks, the Cistercians of Clairvaux. The goal of finding God is the same for each group, but the means of achieving the goal differs depending on the situation of the hearer. (Is this not a valid homiletical guideline?) Burch says, "Seeking God through direct love is the hermit's way. Seeking God through love of neighbor is the Benedictine way."¹⁵

¹⁵ Bernard of Clairvaux, The Steps of Humility trans. G. B. Burch (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1940), 107.

I have in mind specifically Bernard's discussion of the three-fold path to Truth: knowing oneself; knowing one's neighbor; knowing God. With reference to the ecstatic mood alluded to above, namely, to be snatched up to the fourth degree of love, one might begin with Chapter VIII of "The Steps of Humility" ("In raptu Sancti Pauli"). It begins: "Do you not suppose that Paul, who said that he was caught up to the third heaven, passed through these steps?"¹⁶ Being 'caught up,' as it were, implies that the Apostle did not attain to the third heaven by any strength or labor of his own. This means that the highest form of Truth, which is contemplation of God, is not something one can achieve on his own, so Bernard interprets. It is given by a power outside oneself. One is reminded here of St. Augustine's doctrine of irresistible Grace.

In order to understand the importance of this idea, it is necessary to trace the movement of the soul up the ladder of Truth. The presupposition of Truth is humility. Humility is defined as knowledge of one's 'existential' (not essential) worthlessness and meanness. Bernard says:

Humility is that thorough self-examination which makes a man contemptible in his own sight. It is acquired by those who set up a ladder in their hearts whereby to ascend from virtue to virtue, that is, from step to step [the Benedictine Rule], until they attain the summit of humility, from where, as from the Zion of speculation [contemplation], they can see the truth.¹⁷

¹⁶Ibid., 167.

¹⁷Ibid., 125.

Or as Burch puts it, contemplation as mystical recollection "is the hilltop to which the steps of humility lead, and from which, after a laborious climb, a clear view of truth is finally attained."¹⁸

Having reached the summit of humility, one sees that "the knowledge of truth consists itself of three steps . . ."¹⁹ Bernard says that

We seek truth in ourselves, in our neighbors, and in its own nature: in ourselves, judging ourselves; in our neighbors, sympathizing with their ills; in its own nature, contemplating with a pure heart.²⁰

Thus it would seem that the three faculties of reason, will and memory are brought to bear on the process of seeking the Truth. In brief, truth is a function of the soul which consists of those three faculties. In turn, the soul, which was created in the imago dei, is but a reflection of the Trinity, so that reason reflects the Son, the will the Holy Spirit, and memory the Father. Furthermore, these faculties each function in a way which is analogous to the process outlined as the threefold path to truth, namely, reason (discernment) vis a vis the Son, the will (affection) vis a vis the Holy Spirit, and memory (mystical recollection or contemplation) vis a vis the Father. It follows that at the first step the Son as judge enables the reason to discern the truth about oneself, "that you are wretched indeed . . ."²¹ On the second rung,

¹⁸Ibid., 240, note 9.

¹⁹Ibid., 133.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid., 147.

the Holy Spirit frees the will to be merciful. Having learned from the Son by means of reason the terrible truth concerning oneself, one is driven to save one's neighbor from the same fate by means of deeds of mercy and compassion, which are a function of the will. If the first step of truth is justice, the second step is mercy. Those who know the truth about themselves are free to love their neighbors, but only when they seek the truth "in their neighbors, when they learn others wants from their own, when they know from their own miseries how to commiserate with others who are miserable."²² Finally, one reaches the third step of mystical ecstatic contemplation of God under the tutelage of the Father. The word 'ecstatic' is the key, for as we said, Bernard has in mind the mystical rapture of Paul in II Corinthians 12.

Now the point of all of this will be lost if we fail to mention the topic of discussion, which is the Resurrection of Christ and its significance to those in Christ. One may say that Bernard's schema of salvation, which is defined here as knowledge of Truth, would be meaningless if the soul, i.e., the life of the believer, were dead in sin. Talk of three steps of truth based on a foundation of humility has no meaning if the soul is dead. Burch's introduction to "The Steps of Humility" provides some interesting and relevant material. He quotes from "Sermones de Tempore, de Sanctis, de Diversis."²³ In this sermon Bernard makes explicit what has only been implied in what we have already examined: there are two deaths and two resurrections. The

²² Ibid., 155.

²³ Xenia Bernardina, Pars Prima, Sermon 116. Cited in Ibid.

first 'death and resurrection' is "metaphysical." It happens to the soul while it remains in the body. The second is physical. At the time of death, by definition of death itself, the soul is separated from the body. It then abides outside the body and awaits reunion with a new body at the moment of the physical resurrection. Thus the first 'death and resurrection' is moral or allegorical (anagogic), the second literal.

Bernard says:

There are two deaths and two resurrections. The first death is of the soul, the second of the body; the death of the soul is separation from God, the death of the body is separation of the soul from the body; the former is effected by sin, the latter by penalty of sin. Moreover, the first resurrection is of the soul, the second of the body; the resurrection of the soul is effected by Christ's humble and secret coming, the resurrection of the body is effected by Christ's glorious and open coming . . . And just as the body . . . recovers life and sensitivity in its resurrection, so also the soul . . . recovers life and sensitivity in its resurrection, that is, knowledge and love.²⁴

Death of the soul, then, happens while the soul continues in this present body. Sin has caused the soul to die. Christ comes in secret to revive the soul, to give it new life as knowledge and love. In that sense, it may be said that the soul is resurrected by divine power. The capacity of the soul to animate the body is by virtue of an infusion of divine vitality. As the soul is to the body so is God to the soul. Without the soul, the body dies and awaits resurrection when Christ will come openly and in power. Without God the soul dies and awaits the secret coming of Christ to give it new life. This revitalization, as we saw above, is couched in terms of an inward state of consciousness. It is a psychological condition.

²⁴Bernard, The Steps of Humility, 8.

Now the agency of death is sin, both "metaphysically" (death of the soul) and physically (death of the body). New life is knowledge and love of God which overcomes sin. Death of the soul is the fall of its faculties of memory, will and reason into a state of weakness, impurity and blindness. Resurrection of the soul is the giving back of those good qualities of strength, purity and vision. In short, resurrection of the soul is the revitalization of each of its faculties. To paraphrase Burch, faith illumines the reason, hope lifts up the memory, and love purges the will.²⁵ Now that is exactly what happens to the soul in the process of discovering Truth. It passes through a three step evolutionary process of perfection which begins with humility and ends with mystical or ecstatic contemplation of God. In the process the fires of love warm the heart which waits for the resurrection to achieve its consummation. If the anthropological problem is that man is a soul which was made in the image and likeness of God, yet separated from God by sin, ignorance and wretchedness (which are bodily states), then the miracle of salvation is the knowledge that one day God will transform this miserable body of death. In the meantime, one waits in hope while attempting to scale the ladder of humility to reach the summit where he can begin the process of seeking the truth, unimpaired by bodily needs and lusts and desires.

It would seem, therefore, that Bernard cannot avoid having some hope for resurrection of the body along with the soul here and now. If the soul can be made alive again, if the faculties can each experience resurrection, what is to keep the soul from sinking back into the mire

²⁵ Ibid., 10-11.

of cupidity and concupiscence? Somehow, some way, it must be possible to reach the highest heaven now, while still in the body. Paul allows this interpretation when he says, "I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up the third heaven--whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows." (II Cor. 12:2) This does open the door of speculation on what might happen to a body which underwent such an experience. It does sound as if Paul may have believed that he himself experienced something like what he later described as transformation of the body at the time of resurrection. (I Cor. 15:51ff.) That is to say, his vision of what is to happen may be based on a personal experience which was then universalized.

Bernard may have wondered: is it possible to acquire the very nature of the risen and exalted Jesus here and now? When we look again at "De diligendo deo" we see that his answer is at least ambiguous and at most negative. Notwithstanding the power of God to bestow the highest degree of love on anyone he wills, it would appear that Bernard denies this perfect state of existence is ever reached on earth. "Do we think," he asks rhetorically, "that the holy martyrs actually attained to this grace, even in part, while still detained in those victorious bodies of theirs?"²⁶ His answer allows for a wide interpretation, in that the power of love within gave them strength to scorn physical torments. But even though physical pain was incapable of destroying their inner peace, it must have disturbed their calm. This means that it must have impaired their ability to love. The implication is that

²⁶ Bernard, St. Bernard on the Love of God, 40.

if the 'holy martyrs' could not achieve the fourth degree of love while still in the body, then it is impossible.

Connolly's translation of the relevant text goes this way:

Great power of love, certainly had caught up their souls, within, and thus they had strength so to expose their bodies, without, and contemn their tortures. But, assuredly, the sense of most bitter pain could not but disturb their calm, although it had no power to destroy their peace.²⁷

Hugh Martin renders a softer, less rigid translation:

Surely that was immeasurable strength of love which enraptured their souls, enabling them to laugh at fleshly torments and to yield their lives gladly. But even though the frightful pain could not destroy their peace of mind, it must have impaired somewhat its perfection.²⁸

These two interpretations agree that according to Bernard the highest degree of affection, which is perfection of love for the sake of God alone, is not achievable this side of the grave. Indeed, as the discussion which follows will try to show, perfect love is not possible according to Bernard this side of the resurrection at the end of history.

Bernard denies further that even the soul, when it is separated from the body at the hour of death, may achieve that perfect state of love. "But what," he says, "of souls separated from their bodies?"²⁹ Those souls, which are "completely immersed in that sea of eternal light and of eternity overflowing with light," are nonetheless "not yet completely changed from their former selves," because a kind of natural affection still binds them to their former bodies. Connolly paraphrases Bernard in this fashion:

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Bernard, On Loving God, 50.

²⁹ Bernard, St. Bernard on the Love of God, 41.

. . . disembodied souls depend upon their bodies neither for life nor perception, yet they have a natural longing which will not be satisfied until they are again united with their bodies.³⁰

Bernard himself goes on to set down two conditions to be met before perfection of the soul in love can be attained. The first is that "Death is swallowed up in victory," which is Paul's allusion to Isaiah 25:8 in I Cor. 15:54d. The second is when souls are reunited with their own bodies at the resurrection.

By quoting Paul again, and thereby alluding to the main point of resurrection of the dead in I Corinthians 15, Bernard can only mean that perfection of love, the highest degree of love possible, when one does not love even oneself except for the sake of God, will come at the moment of resurrection. As I have tried to show, Bernard believed that perfect love is not possible while the soul is united to the flesh, nor is it possible in the interim period, while the soul is 'immersed in that sea of eternal light and of eternity overflowing with the light.' Instead, perfection of love will occur, to quote Paul, "in a moment, in the time it takes the eye to blink." At that moment, according to the Apostle, "the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we all shall be transformed."

This transformation and restoration of the body is perceived by Bernard as a glorification of the body, "the very moment when perpetual light invades the boundaries of night on every side and holds the soul."³¹ The entire corpus of I Corinthians 15, including the splendor of the

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Ibid.

spiritual body and its imperishable and incorruptible nature, is brought to bear on the discussion at this point. Bernard is interpreting the highest form of love, where one even loves oneself for God's sake, in light of the categories of Paul's eschatological theology. In brief, that perfect love which transcends all human thought and achievement will be attained at the moment of the transformation of the earthly body into a heavenly body. Until that moment

there will not be that complete absorption of souls in God, which is their perfect and highest state; nor would the spirit now seek again for the fellowship of the flesh if it could attain to its perfect consummation without it.³²

This latter phrase is interesting. Notwithstanding Paul's disclaimer that "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God," Bernard evidently believed in the reunion of the soul with a restored body of flesh. To paraphrase with Martin, "the spirit would not yearn for reunion with the flesh if without the flesh it could be consummated."³³ In short, consummation or perfection of the soul in love will happen in the flesh! Then the body/soul will be absorbed in God ("faint away into God" according to Connolly) and attain final perfection. This form of mystical contemplation seems somehow Oriental in tone.

Here we see quite clearly Bernard's view of the body as an aid to salvation. This is how Connolly and Martin translate the text:

To the soul that loves God the body avails in its weakness, it avails in its death, it avails in its restoration: in the first instance, for the fruit of penitence; in the second, for the rest; in the last,

³²Ibid.

³³Bernard, On Loving God, 51.

for consummation. Rightly she does not wish to be made perfect without that which she feels helps her to what is good for her in every state.³⁴

The body is a help to the soul that loves God, even when it is ill, even when it is dead, and all the more when it is raised from the dead: for illness is an aid to penitence; death is the gate of rest; and the resurrection will bring consummation. So, rightly, the soul would not be perfected without the body, since she recognizes that in every condition it has been needful to her good.³⁵

Here we can see why the doctrine of resurrection of the body is so important for Bernard. It is because the soul cannot be consummated without the body. Salvation might be said to be "psychosomatic," i.e., consisting of the unity of body and soul. Outside the body, which is equated with the flesh, there can be no perfection of the soul. Indeed, life of any kind is inconceivable outside the body. The body is not a hindrance but an aid to salvation. Furthermore, the career of the body which is outlined in the quotations above shows that it exists in three states: the wearisome state of earthly existence, a time when it must be disciplined by the rigors of the monastic rule; the state of rest in the grave, the same 'rest' that is no doubt suggested by the writer of Hebrews (cf. the fourth chapter of that book); and, finally, the glorious state to come, which was promised by Paul in I Cor. 15. This is what the abbot says of the three bodily states:

The first state is full of toil but abounding in fruit [of penitence]; the second is one of complete repose but in no way wearisome [or 'monotonous,' so Martin]; the third abounds in glory as well.³⁶

³⁴ Bernard, St. Bernard on the Love of God, 42.

³⁵ Bernard, On Loving God, 51.

³⁶ Bernard, St. Bernard on the Love of God, 42.

Bernard has defended the orthodox doctrine of the resurrection of the flesh with a great deal of persuasive vigor. Apparently heaven is peopled with beings of glorious fleshly restoration! This gives new meaning to the term "heavenly body."

Bernard's analysis of somatic existence, which is represented by the bodily states of toil, rest, and glory, according to his interpretation of the Song of Solomon, is affirmed by the Bridegroom. In 5:1, the Bridegroom invites one to eat and drink and get drunk, at least that is what the preacher tells us his version of the Old Testament (the Vulgate?) says. In the Revised Standard Version one can see evidence of Hebrews parallelism: to eat and drink deeply, not get drunk. Yet this is how Bernard interprets the verse:

Those still toiling in the body he calls to food; those who laid down the body and are enjoying complete repose, he invites to drink; those who take their bodies up he urges even to inebriation . . .³⁷

Bernard visualizes salvation as a heavenly banquet or wedding feast of the Bride (the Church) and the Bridegroom (Christ), a feast for God's most beloved who eat and drink at Christ's table in his kingdom. This vision of the future state is the highest form of existence he can imagine, with Christians becoming drunk on love at the table of our Lord. Those who are gathered about the communion table will be

filled with truth, not with strong drink, not drenched with wine, but on fire with God. Thus the fourth degree of love is now possessed forever when God alone is loved in the highest possible degree; because, now, we do not even love ourselves save for his sake, so that he himself is the reward of those who love him, the reward eternal of them who love for all eternity.³⁸

³⁷Ibid., 43.

³⁸Ibid., 45.

Although he is speaking in the present tense, the context clearly shows that this is a vision of the future, a state of existence which will follow the resurrection. Paradise will some day be regained.

One final word needs to be said. In his summary chapter on the degrees of love (XV), Bernard says that love has its source in the flesh because humanity is carnal and is born of the concupiscence of flesh. Love may, however, with proper guidance ("directed according to the right order of things") attain to perfection in the spirit. The proof-text he offers for this opinion is I Cor. 15:46, to wit: "But it is not the spiritual which is first but the physical, then the spiritual." Paul is speaking of bodies. Bernard is speaking of love directed through degrees or states of being in the body. It is necessary according to the proper order for love to begin in the flesh, then to proceed through successive levels of involvement with God to attain the summum bonum, which is perfection of love.

As to the problem of the reunion of the soul with a fleshly body at the moment of resurrection (see above), Bernard cannot ignore the tradition that "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." He interprets this verse in terms of the philosophical argument of substance and accidents (or qualities). The substance of flesh will remain. The quality or 'accident' of concupiscence, for example, will not. Concupiscence may be understood as a quality of the flesh which will not abide. This would imply that the sticky wicket of original sin has been safely batted through. Bernard writes:

Not that the substance of flesh will not be there, but that every carnal necessity will be wanting and the love of the flesh will be

absorbed in the love of the spirit, and human affections . . . shall be changed into those which are divine.³⁹

In other words, at the moment of resurrection the body/flesh will be transformed. Bodily needs, concupiscence, and natural affections will not inherit the kingdom of God, but will themselves be changed into divine qualities, although the substance of flesh will still be there in the kingdom. So we conclude our examination of Bernard's interpretation of Paul's vision of the resurrection of the dead.

SENSUS PLENIOR

In sympathy with the mood of his time, Bernard suggested that the task of the interpreter was to seek the hidden meaning of the text. In short, he allegorized. His presupposition was that the purpose of preaching is to share the Lord of love with one's hearers. His preaching, therefore, had a sacramental quality, in that Jesus is made known in the act of preaching just as he is made known in the breaking of bread.

The allegorizing of Scripture, perhaps because of the influence of Martin Luther on Protestant thought, seems to be given short shrift by contemporary homiletical and exegetical theoreticians. But it has also been recognized in our day that with the passage of time the literal meaning of a text takes on a significance that was not part of the intentionality of the original author. The varying interpretation of the Constitution of the United States of America in the history of juridical hermeneutics is a good example of this principle. It may therefore be affirmed that biblical texts contain a hidden or spiritual meaning which

³⁹Ibid., 54.

was not intended by the sacred writer but is there nonetheless. So Bultmann can say that as a method of hermeneutics his program of "demythologizing" is an attempt to retain the "deeper meaning" of mythological concepts.⁴⁰ Biblical language is richly suggestive of meaning. Perhaps God intends to express today through the text more than the biblical writer was capable of understanding. Perhaps there really is progress in revelation.

In the same vein Raymond E. Brown has argued that "God intends to express through the words of Scripture a deeper meaning than that which the hagiographer understood and intended."⁴¹ By that light, e.g., Old Testament prophecy held a deeper meaning for the Christian church than the prophets themselves could have intended, since they were writing before Christ. According to the church, then, Jesus fulfilled the word of the prophets, since in Christ their preaching took on a richer and deeper significance. This is not to belittle the literal meaning of the text, nor to deny its place in history. Sensus plenior as a theory of meaning is historical insofar as it recognizes that the literal sense is descriptive of actual events in the past. But the literal meaning is

⁴⁰R. Bultmann, Jesus Christ and Mythology (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), 18.

⁴¹Raymond E. Brown, "The History and Development of the Theory of A Sensus Plenior," Catholic Biblical Quarterly, XV, 1 (April 1953), 142. But see the objection to this theory in E. D. Hirsch, Jr., Validity in Interpretation (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 126n. Primarily he objects to the view that there can be two authors, one human and the other divine.

concerned only with what the text meant. The theory of a fuller sense is concerned with what the text means and attempts to appropriate the message of the text for our day. It is no coincidence that this happens to be the task of Christian proclamation which takes Scripture seriously. Biblical preaching has at least one central task, and that is to translate biblical modes of thought into main currents of modern thought and thereby to provide a framework of meaning by awakening faith in God.

Chapter 5

MARTIN LUTHER: DEFENDER OF THE FAITH

Heiko Oberman¹ has pointed out that the difference between medieval and Reformation preaching lies in the function of the sermon. That is to say, in the Reformation there was a new understanding of what the sermon does. During the Middle Ages the function of the sermon was to drive sinners to repentance, to place them in a position where they would seek the sacrament of penance by disposing them to confess their sins and seek forgiveness in the confessional. During the Reformation the sermon was seen not as a preparation for encounter with God but was understood itself to be an encounter with God. The sermon functioned eschatologically. It was the place where the eternal will of God was revealed in the present moment of the hearer's existence. It had the quality of judgment, of condemnation or salvation. It was the Word of God alive and active in the present.

Oberman develops his view of the sermon as an eschatological event in light of the Reformation's understanding of the double action of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit opens the Bible as the Word of God and at the same time opens the heart of the hearer to receive that word as promise or threat. In other words, the sermon has taken on the quality of a corporate act, with the Holy Spirit providing the vital link between preacher and hearer. This idea in turn is related to the

¹Heiko A. Oberman, "Reformation, Preaching, and Ex Opere Operato," in Daniel J. Callahan (ed.) Christianity Divided (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1961), 223-239.

sacramental quality of the sermon. While it is true that the sermon was seen to mediate salvation, it did not do so automatically. By holding that faith on the part of the hearer was necessary in order for the sermon to effect salvation, the Reformation rejected the idea of ex opere operato.

We can see, therefore, that the Reformation sermon functioned holistically and was comprised of three elements. The sermon, while consisting of words spoken by a human being, was the Word of God in the present. According to the Reformers the Word of God as a word of divine judgment sought out the heart of the hearer and demanded repentance. The hearer responded in faith, and grace was imparted. The wholeness of this corporate act was ensured by the double action of the Holy Spirit who at once opened the Bible as the Word of God through the words of the preacher and opened the heart of the hearer to receive that redemptive Word. Here we can see the "hermeneutical circle" of Reformation interpretation and homiletical theory. Faith as a divine act preceded the understanding and reception of the Word of God through the sermon as an eschatological event which mediated grace. In brief, the Bible as the Word of God functioned uniformly as judgment and grace, mediated by the sermon as an exposition of the Word. The homiletical method was to take the message of Scripture on its own terms and relate its central thrust to the hearer who responded in faith. During the Reformation, preaching was understood to be the meeting ground of God and humankind.

Gerhard Ebeling² seems to reflect the Reformation's understanding of the nature of preaching when he says that the Bible is not a legal document but a document of preaching. This seems to mean that the Bible is not to be interpreted authoritatively in the same way that a court, for example, renders judicial decisions, but is the locus of faith. When interpreted by means of oral proclamation (preaching), the Bible takes on the quality of event, of disclosure, of evoking faith in the hearer. When we apply this idea to the Reformation, this may be simply stated in terms of a theory of interpretation: sola scriptura. This interpretive slogan simply meant that the Bible is clear; it interprets itself. The function of the preacher was to release the power of the Word of God by a clear exposition of its meaning. In addition, a new element had been introduced which denounced implicitly the 'objectivity' of the church's historical interpretive tradition with the acknowledgment of the need of faith on the part of the exegete. Faith experience was necessary in order for the interpreter to understand and appropriate the central message of God's salvation. By the power of the Holy Spirit the interpreter was illuminated by the knowledge in faith that Jesus Christ and his salvation constitute the meaning of Scripture. Even though by and large the Reformers rejected allegory in the name of historical exegesis, they recognized that the literal sense only supplies the primary meaning of the text. There is a secondary or spiritual meaning which is available only to the person

²Gerhard Ebeling, The Nature of Faith (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1961).

of faith. For Martin Luther, the spiritual meaning of Scripture was Jesus Christ. Luther's exegesis was a christocentric method of interpretation which probed the deeper meaning of Scripture. It may be said that Luther too, like the Antiochene theoria before him, anticipated the modern theory of sensus plenior, the view that there is a fuller or deeper meaning to the text than its literal meaning. There is a fuller sense to Scripture, intended by God, but not fully understood or intended by the sacred writer himself. This deeper meaning Luther found in Jesus Christ, whose coming was anticipated if not fully understood by the prophets of old.

Martin Luther, preacher, apologist, theologian, Doctor of Holy Scripture, looms large in the history of preaching as an example of the truth that theology exists to serve proclamation. Jaroslav Pelikan³ sees four exegetical principles at work in Luther's theology. They are his doctrine of the Word of God, in which the centrality of the Scriptures and the primacy of the Word of God flow together, his understanding and use of the interpretive tradition of the church, his view of the Bible as history, and finally the role of polemics or argumentative theology. All four rubrics are evident in his sermons on the resurrection of the dead, not to mention Oberman's view of the sermon as an eschatological event. These sermons are apocalyptic.

Luther understood the Bible as the Word of God insofar as it participates in the deeds of God recorded on its pages and serves as a

³Jaroslav Pelikan, Luther the Exposition (St. Louis: Concordia, 1973).

repository of the apostolic preaching. His exegesis was christo-centric. The Exodus, for example, anticipates the ultimate salvific set in Christ. In that sense Luther read the Old Testament as Paul read it. In turn, the redemptive Word of God in Christ anticipates the present Word of God in the church. The present Word came to be by means of the oral proclamation which was a recitation of the Word of God in Christ. The basic form of the Word of God is the oral word of preaching. Scripture, as the written Word of God, functions to sustain the oral proclamation and to preserve it from error. The Word of God has this basic character, that it is both deed and proclamation. To borrow Ebeling's term, it is "word-event," whose function is to disclose God's final Word in Jesus Christ.

According to Pelikan, Luther inherited a three-fold view of authority: the canon of Scripture; an interpretive tradition and a confession of faith; a monarchical episcopate. He elevated the authority of Scripture at the expense of tradition and the Pope and the magistrum. He objected not so much to the tradition per se but to its canonization. He read the church fathers and honored them as biblical expositors, but he drew the line at the point of taking their word as equal to Scripture. In Luther's mind there was a well-defined line separating tradition from the Bible itself.

Luther's method of historical interpretation demonstrates a certain ambivalence. Even though his rallying cry was 'Beware of allegories!,' still he allegorized in his sermons. Luther read the Bible as a history of the church. His ecclesiology was, therefore, a

prime ingredient in his understanding of the history of Israel. The same thing is true of his christology, as we have seen.

Finally, Luther's polemics were bound up with his view of the Bible. Against Rome he defended his own interpretation of Scripture, as well as his right to hold it. While he was defending his understanding of Scripture, he was also shaping it. This means that in the process of developing his defense his exegesis took on a unique coloration as he attempted to recover the meaning of the text within the context of the entire Bible. This methodological consideration gave rise to what is perhaps his most important contribution to Christian interpretation in the Protestant tradition: wherever possible seek the precise meaning of the text. It is the task of the preacher to analyze the text itself, not only what others have said about it. This hermeneutical principle turned over the apple cart of traditional ecclesiastical authority. The meaning of the text, however, is to be sought in the context of the Christian community. Luther did not view interpretation as an individual and private affair, but as a function of the community of faith. Luther's polemics are well illustrated by his sermons on the resurrection of the dead,⁴ to which we now turn.

SERMONS ON I CORINTHIANS 15

August 11, 1532: I Cor. 15:1-7.

Luther defends Paul's doctrine of the resurrection of the dead in terms of a reliance on the Creed, namely "the article pertaining to

⁴These sermons appear as a commentary in Martin Luther,

the Last day, the resurrection, and the future life . . ." (1, page 60) It is the article on which all "hope and consolation should be based." Echoing Paul he states: "For where this article is surrendered, all the others are gone too; and the chief article and the entire Christ are lost or preached entirely in vain." (cf. I Cor. 15:14)

Luther's purpose, like Paul's, is apologetic in scope. He wants to defend this article of faith against those who he thinks are contemporary despisers of the faith. He lumps Paul's opponents at Corinth together with those in his own day who, he says, "prate so absurdly, shamelessly, and heathenishly about this when they presume to be so smart and stick their nose into the Scriptures." (1, page 59)

For Luther the resurrection is "the goal of our faith in Christ, of Baptism, of sermon, and of Sacrament . . ." (1, page 60) This means "that we hope for a new life, that we come to Christ, that we rule eternally with him, delivered from sin, devil, death, and every evil." For this preacher faith in the resurrection is not simply one step in the process of salvation but the consummation of every longing of the Christian heart. The resurrection is realized in human life as a lure to fulfillment in Christ. It signifies the new life promised by the gospel of John. One gathers that according to Luther the article on the resurrection of the dead defines and delimits the fourth gospel's doctrine of eternal life. He shares this interpretive characteristic with Chrysostom.

Commentary on I Corinthians 15 (St. Louis: Concordia, 1973) XXVIII, 59-213. All references are to sermon and page number.

The disaffection of some of the Corinthians with this doctrine is a warning, he says, to present-day Christians who are concerned with preserving the Word of God from adulteration. Paul's dispute with his disciples

has been recorded as our warning and admonition, that we, having the precious Word in its purity, be concerned and intent on being guided by it, apprehend it well and firmly, adhere to it, and do not become slothful, secure and weary of it, lest factious spirits and wiseacres arise also among us to destroy these articles of faith and deprive us of them, on which our entire salvation and happiness are founded. (1, page 61)

The purity of this doctrine can only be preserved by the pulpit. Preachers must be its guardians and defenders. "For if only the pastors remain faithful and preserve the doctrine, God will bestow his grace that there will always be a number to accept it . . ." (1, page 62)

Please note that salvation is equated here with the acceptance of doctrine, insofar as faith, here acceptance of the teaching of the church, is an act of divine grace. Luther was not above appealing to ecclesiastical tradition and authority when it suited his purposes.

Luther's main concern seems to be that false teachers will arise who deny the doctrine publicly. Since in his mind it is God's Truth, denial of it would be tantamount to blasphemy. Therefore, he says,

it is indeed necessary that we pray earnestly, sincerely, and incessantly to have the pulpit remain pure, so that such affliction may be prevented or checked. For the pulpit can still staunchly resist all sorts of error and endure the whole world of malice. (1, page 63)

One gathers that in this sermon at least he is addressing a group of his own disciples, probably pastors who have left the church to join Luther in his revolt against the magisterium.

Comment on verses 1 and 2. Luther has an axe to grind. In commenting on Paul's reminder to hold fast to the saving gospel, he notes that Paul "had the same experience that we have today at the hands of our factions." (1, page 65) Apparently some of Luther's disciples are departing from his teaching. He solidly aligns himself with Paul's gospel against those who would pervert his own teaching. He implies that he is a true pastor and alone proclaims the truth against a whole world of blasphemers. In this vein he says:

But when Paul and other true pastors boast thus--as indeed they must boast of their gospel--and declare that they alone proclaim the truth, and when the factious spirits [Luther's detractors?] hear this, they become foolish and silly and make such an ado . . . (1, page 66; emphasis added)

Evidently he feels beleaguered by former followers who have progressed beyond preaching "about nothing but Baptism, the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer, and the Creed . . ." For Luther these are the fundamental topics of preaching. To reject even one article of the Creed is to jeopardize his entire program of preaching, not to mention his own authority. For it seems clear that, also like Paul, Luther is not only defending the resurrection of the dead but his authority as a true pastor who preaches only God's Truth. Luther, as well as his preaching program, is under attack by 'factious spirits.' In short, his defense of the Creed is a defense of the gospel according to Martin Luther.

Luther's preaching program has at its heart the superiority of faith over reason. In his view it is Paul's purpose from the start "to lead us away from all disputation and tutelage of reason and direct us solely to the Word, which he had received from Christ and had proclaimed to them" (1, page 68; please note that he is interpreting

I Cor. 15:3 in the light of Gal. 1:12) He expands this idea with the observation "that faith must have absolutely nothing but the Word on its side and must permit no subtle argumentation or human ideas in addition." That is the way, according to the preacher, to retain and preserve faith. Faith, as it were, transcends the notion that the sum total of knowledge is what can be comprehended through the sensorium. That is the implication of his faith understanding. In modern terms, Luther rejects the positivistic doctrine that holds up the scientific method as the only valid epistemological tool. He recognizes further that the notion that belief is predicated on understanding, which may be seen in that statement, "I can believe only what I understand," is invalid. It is not that understanding is unimportant. Theology is, after all, faith seeking understanding. But faith has a prior commitment to the Word of God as revealed. It must transcend human reason and wisdom and "cling to whatever the Word submits." (1, page 69) Luther says, "Reason and human competence do not enable faith to do that, but this is the work of the Holy Spirit on the heart of man." This means that faith is superior to reason because the Holy Spirit has written the Word on the human heart. This is the key to comprehend his hermeneutic. One achieves faith as a gift of the Spirit which enables one to accept the teachings of the Scriptures which appear unreasonable or even irrational to the human mind. Only faith can truly comprehend the meaning of the Resurrection of Christ and of those in Christ.

Reason is helpless to understand the significance of the resurrection of the dead, according to Luther. To reason, the idea of a body and soul (classical anthropological dualism) being reunited

following physical death is absurd. Reason reasons "that one person dies after another, remains dead, decomposes, and crumbles to dust in the grave, from which no one has ever returned . . ." (1, page 69)

Luther admits that this is a telling argument, but as a man of faith he cannot stop there. He writes:

I, too, feel my sin and the Law and the devil on my neck. I feel myself oppressed under these heavy burdens. But what am I to do? If I were to judge according to my feeling and my ability, I, together with other men, should have to perish and despair. However, if I wish to be helped, I must surely turn about and look to the Word and say accordingly, 'Indeed, I feel God's wrath, the devil, death, and hell; but the Word conveys a different message, namely, that I have a gracious God through Christ, who is my Lord over the devil and all creatures. To be sure, I feel and see that all other men must rot in the ground; but the Word informs me differently, namely, that I shall rise in great glory and live eternally. (1, pp. 70-71)

Luther calls this assurance the knowledge and wisdom of faith. It is to be believed contrary to experience. He insists that we "must first believe contrary to our experience what cannot be believed humanly, and that we must feel what we do not feel." (1, page 71) I suppose that if he were pressed, Luther would call this the paradox of faith, that one believes despite all evidence to the contrary. But can one really feel what one does not feel? The answer is in the affirmative, if by divine power:

For to believe firmly that I am a Christian . . . and that I am saved, when I feel sin and a bad conscience; to believe that I will live eternally, endowed with a beautiful, glorious body, although I lie under the sod--that requires a divine and heavenly power and a wisdom which is not governed by any feeling or perceiving, but which can look beyond that, convinced that this is not human prattle or fantasy but that it is the Word of God . . . (1, page 72)

The proof of all this lies in the unquestionable and incontrovertible fact of the Resurrection of Christ, to wit: "For God has already resurrected our Lord Jesus Christ." Here Luther departs company from

Chrysostom, for example, who believed that Christ raised himself from the dead. The same saving Word of the Resurrection of Christ assures one's own resurrection, so that he can say, "but in the Word which we believe and profess they (the dead) are assuredly alive and risen."

(1, page 73) This is a form of assurance which has as a practical result the conviction that the Christian in this life already has been made lord over sin and death, even as Christ himself is Lord of these negative conditions. That is, what Christ has done actually will be fulfilled for Christians at their own resurrection, "so that neither death nor sin will be seen or felt any longer." This means that death is no longer to be feared, since its power to hurt has been removed by virtue of Christ's Resurrection and one's eventual victory over it.

Comment on verses 3 through 7. Here Luther addresses the proof of the Resurrection and says that Paul used Scripture and human experience to establish it. In commenting on the text, he points out that Paul took the Resurrection "from Scripture and that he proves this with Scripture. In the second place, he cites his own experience and that of many others who saw the resurrected Christ." (1, page 76)

Paul adduced proof from Scripture for two reasons, to discredit allegorizing and to enhance faith to the detriment of reason.

To be sure, he does not do this without reason. He does this in the first place to resist the mad spirits who disdain Scripture and the external message and in place of this seek other secret revelation. (1, page 76)

In the second place, Paul does this in order to resist . . . the temptation to take counsel with reason in this and other articles of faith, or to listen how the world with its wisdom presumes subtly to argue and speculate about this. For if we consult these and

permit them to teach us in this, faith will be crowded out, and this will be regarded as a foolish message, and be made sheer mockery. (1, page 77)

The upshot of all this is the following rule of exegesis:

These articles of faith which we preach are not based on human reason and understanding, but on Scripture; it follows that they must not be sought anywhere but in Scripture or explained otherwise than with Scripture. (1, page 77)

The touchstone of true doctrine, then, is Scripture and reliable experience. In fact, however, there is really only one proof that counts.

The Bible says so. As the last quote above shows, the two arguments are one, that being an unquestioning obedience to the letter of Scripture.

For as we know, the experience of everyone who reported an encounter with the risen Christ is not directly accessible. It is mediated through the New Testament. For Luther, then, Scripture is the one, normative, and infallible guide to Truth, thus giving meaning to the slogan, sola scriptura. Like Chrysostom before him, Luther has taken the 'divine foolishness' of I Cor. 1:18ff. quite seriously.

September 8, 1532: I Cor. 15:8-11.

This sermon purports to be a defense of the apostleship of Paul, but it is really Luther's defense of himself, his preaching and interpretation of Scripture. As we have already seen, he identifies strongly with Paul, seeing historical parallels between his life 'under law and sin and death' and Paul's. In commenting on the text, which speaks of Christ appearing to Paul 'last of all,' he says:

This is recorded to serve as an example for us. For we, too, must boast over against the papacy and all factions that God gave us this Word and true preachers of the same. And although they despise us and condemn us as heretics, we are for all that true pastors and servants of Christ. (2, page 91)

It is almost as if Luther is claiming the same apostolic authority that Paul and the others did, that of having experienced the living Christ in terms of a christophanic experience. Luther seems to be saying that he received the same kind of divine revelation as Paul, which he in turn transmitted to his followers. Only he and his disciples preach the Truth, which came directly from God. This is a bold claim.

September 22, 1532: I Cor. 15:12-15.

In this sermon we see Luther's position on the Resurrection as the chief article of faith:

Paul stakes everything on the basic factor with which he began, namely that Christ rose from the dead. This is the chief article of Christian doctrine. No one who at all claims to be a Christian or a preacher of the Gospel may deny that. With this he wants to confront them and force them to the conclusion that their denial of the resurrection of the dead denies even more definitely that Christ rose from the dead; for if the former is not true, the latter must be fabricated also. And since every Christian must believe and confess that Christ has risen from the dead, it is easy to persuade him to accept also the resurrection of the dead; or he must deny in a lump the gospel and everything that is proclaimed of Christ and of God. For all this is linked together like a chain, and if one article of faith stands, they all stand. Therefore Paul also makes all things interdependent here, and he always deduces one thing from the other. (3, page 94)

If a chain is only as strong as its weakest link, then Luther's "catena" of salvation shows signs of breaking. Here we have a classic example of proving one article of faith by another, in this case the resurrection of the dead by the Resurrection of Christ. It does not follow that belief in the Resurrection automatically involves the other, although that is indeed how Paul argued. Conversely, it simply is not logical that denial of the resurrection of the dead is a denial of the other. Certainly Luther's view, and he is following Paul here, that to deny the

resurrection of the dead is to deny 'in a lump the gospel and everything that is proclaimed of Christ and of God;' is an exaggeration. Paul simply does not go that far.

It is apparent, however, that for Luther the Resurrection of Christ is 'the chief article of the Christian doctrine.' It is, he believes, the touchstone of Christian belief and proclamation. Preaching has its origin in the proclamation that Christ rose from the dead. I agree with his premise if not his conclusion. The preaching of Christ crucified and raised from the dead is essential if proclamation is to remain vital. It is the heartbeat of the gospel, that life triumphs over death.

We may digress at this point to raise a question of interpretation. What does the Resurrection of Christ mean? How is it to be explained? It may be, as Willi Marxsen⁵ argues that the confession 'He is risen!' is merely the first century's way of proclaiming that the cause of Jesus goes on in the life and preaching of the churches. Or it may be as George E. Ladd⁶ has argued in that the statement 'Jesus has risen from the dead' is descriptive of historical fact. Jesus' body was supernaturally transformed so that it was no longer subject to natural law, so that what the New Testament says of the Resurrection is literally true. But wherever one may stand between these two poles, one can scarcely deny the importance of preaching of the proclamation that 'now is Christ risen.' Preaching's raison d'etre, its very essence, may

⁵Willi Marxsen, The Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970).

⁶George E. Ladd, I Believe in the Resurrection of Jesus (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975).

be summarized by this affirmation. One may avoid the Resurrection, but one cannot ignore it. Or one may ignore it to the peril of vital preaching which stands in a venerable tradition. The world needs a word of life in the midst of ceaseless change, decay and death. At least this is what Luther seems to be saying. The purpose of the resurrection of the dead, which is based on the certainty of the Resurrection of Christ, "is to overcome death and to rescue us from death and enable us to live with him eternally." (3, page 95) By speaking of the purpose of resurrection in both senses, Luther would seem to be addressing the question of meaning. Resurrection means life over death.

As we have seen, in the third sermon Luther is attempting to persuade his hearers of the truth of the articles pertaining to the Resurrection of Christ and of the resurrection of the dead. Luther the apologist, the defender of the faith, believes that 'all of this is linked together like a chain, and if one article of faith stands, they all stand.' Conversely, if one article is denied, the whole Creed, indeed the entire gospel, is denied. Luther follows Paul and enlarges on him by asserting that to deny the resurrection of the dead is to deny the Resurrection of Christ and all other matters of faith. As he himself admits, this is not based on logic or human reason but on an undying devotion to the credal formulations of Scripture, so that one must feel what one does not feel. This means that

whoever denies this article must simultaneously deny far more . . . that you believe properly; . . . that the Word which you believe has been true; . . . that we apostles preach correctly and that we are God's apostles; . . . that God is truthful; in brief, that God is God. (3, page 95)

This paraphrase of Paul reveals Luther's attitude towards the preaching of the apostles then and now. Luther is a new Paul who is defending right believing in the name of Christian preaching. No preacher may deny the resurrection for that would be a denial of God himself. Therefore he can summarize his argument in this fashion: "As surely as it is true that God loves and that Christ lives and that Christendom's faith and proclamation are correct and true, this article is also true." (3, page 97) The key word here is 'correct.' Luther the apologist is more concerned with orthodox or correct belief than he is with truth. He sees himself as a sort of neo-Paul defending the truth of orthodoxy against modern day blasphemers who, by denying one article of the Creed, deny God and Christ, indeed the whole of faith. As we have seen, this is rhetorical exaggeration to make a point. It is dogmatic exegesis which limits full understanding.

In summary, Luther reiterates Paul's teaching "that he who denies the resurrection of the dead must also deny that Christ rose from the dead." (3, page 98) He addresses his audience directly in this manner:

. . . if you can believe that God is God, you must also not doubt that you will rise from the dead after this life; for if you were to stay under the ground, God would first have to become a liar and not be God.

A denial of this article is like saying, "I believe that there is no God, no Christ, and that all that is said about faith is an abominable lie." (3, page 99) It is blasphemy.

Luther ends his discourse with a powerful plea to avoid blasphemy and be convinced of the resurrection of the dead. Those who believe this article are convinced that when Christ calls they

will come forth in a moment like a spark, more resplendent than the entire heaven, with your whole body and all your members again completely intact, even though you may now be burned to ashes, consumed in water, torn to bits by wolves, or eaten by ravens. (3, pp. 99-100)

October 6, 1532: I Cor. 15:16-19.

The sermon keys on the idea of hope in this life only. Here the preacher compares the lot of the Christian with the rest of the world.

In comparison with the nonbeliever the

Christian is an especially wretched person, suffering more of whatever may be termed misery than others. His heart is daily roasted on the fire. He must always be terrified, fearful and trembling when the thought of death and God's severe judgment occurs to him. He must always worry that he has angered God and merited hell, although he may be pious and well practiced in faith. (4, page 104)

This is no place to go into a psychological analysis of Luther's religious experience, but the picture of a young monk virtually terror-stricken at his first mass by the idea of the Holy comes to mind. As for his reference to the heart being daily roasted in the fire, one might call on Roland Bainton for explanation. In commenting on young man Luther's description of his agonies of the spirit, Bainton, perhaps somewhat whimsically, writes:

His description tallies so well with a recognized type of mental malady that again one is tempted to wonder whether his disturbance should be regarded as arising from authentic religious difficulties or from gastric or glandular deficiencies.⁷

I was myself thinking of heartburn.

But as Bainton points out, Luther went on to a feeling of forgiveness and thereby learned to hope. Here he says that the Christian's

⁷Roland Bainton, Here I Stand (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1950) 56.

only hope and consolation lie in faith in Christ's Resurrection and belief in our own. Luther's message is that

you must cling with a firm faith to the fact that your Christ has risen from the dead. He, too, suffered such anguish and fear of hell, but through his Resurrection he has overcome all. Therefore, even though I am a sinner and deserving of death and hell, this shall nonetheless be my consolation and my victory, that my Lord Jesus lives and has risen so that he, in the end, might rescue me from sin, death, and hell. (4, page 105)

This is a marvelous example of the gospel's power to heal the sin-sick soul.

October 13, 1532: I Cor. 15:20-22.

This sermon, which treats of Christ as the first fruits of the harvest of the dead, begins with the persistent and by now familiar theme: eschew reason and the five senses; ignore what is seen and felt; hold on to this doctrine in faith.

The text of the sermon is that Christ is the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. In commenting on Paul's use of sleep to signify death, Luther points out that sleep is a sign of the future resurrection. That is, he does not understand it as simply a euphemistic way of speaking of death, but as a sign of a qualitative change in death itself. He says:

For what was a true and eternal death prior to this and without Christ is . . . no longer death; now it has become merely a sleep. And so the Christians who lie in the ground are no longer called dead, but sleepers, who will surely also rise again. (5, pages 109-110)

. . . Paul wishes to signify that the resurrection is to be viewed and understood as having already begun in Christ, . . . and that this remnant of death is to be regarded as no more than a deep sleep, and that the future resurrection of our body will not differ from suddenly awaking from such a sleep. (5, page 110)

The resurrection is also interpreted in terms of birth to another life, using the image of natural child birth. Christ the head has preceded the body, so the body will naturally follow. Here is his very picturesque image: "As in the birth of man and of all animals, the head naturally appears first, and after this is born, the whole body follows easily."

October 20, 1532: I Cor. 15:22-23.

Luther's treatment of death continues. He says that death is not a natural state but a result of Adam's sin, a familiar Pauline theme here and in Romans. Luther says that "Scripture teaches us that our death and dying does not come in a natural way but that this is a fruit of and the penalty for our father Adam's sin." (6, page 116) In like manner, Scripture teaches "that in one man all men shall rise again." This does not happen by virtue of any human merit (he cannot resist this blast at the church) but by faith in the living Christ. This article of faith seems fraudulent to the world, meaning anyone who disagrees with his position. The world argues "that it is impossible for God to be so foolish and to condemn the whole world without distinction for the sake of one man, or . . . to save all men without any merit of theirs for the sake of one man." (6, page 117) This teaching, Luther admits, seems like plain foolishness to the human mind, but the wisdom of God's plan never seems rational. God's wisdom turns human wisdom and reason on its head.

October 27, 1532: I Cor. 15:29-32.

On the Invisible Kingdom of Christ. The present world order will pass away. Until that time Christ reigns "quietly and invisibly in our hearts, solely through the Word." (7, page 125) The only visible manifestation of Christ's present kingdom is Baptism and the Sacrament. All that is heard is the external Word. Now the kingdom is present only in faith in the preached Word. Despite what thought and feeling tell us, "that sin weighs us down, the devil terrifies and harasses us, death kills us, the world persecutes us, and everything overwhelms and oppresses us," in the present order only blind faith can see one through. The heart, according to Luther, is the only 'sense organ' one needs to attend. For the heart is the dwelling place, the very throne of Christ. When Christ comes to awaken the dead, he says, "sin will be erased and drowned, death will be abolished, and removed from view, the devil and the world will lie at your feet." What was once hidden will be revealed. The invisible kingdom of Christ will be manifest for all to see. This spiritual kingdom will abide, although the outward form of preaching and the Sacraments will disappear. At that time the secular kingdom "will be abolished by Christ . . . and destroyed completely." (7, page 127) This is Luther's apocalyptic vision of the passing away of this present world. The Kingdom of God as a life in the Spirit is already present and working its purposes out.

Purpose of the Spiritual Life. The purpose of the spiritual life is to take one to heaven. Since life in this world cannot do that, it is superfluous and will soon pass away.

Therefore, the temporal life will be completely destroyed, and nothing of it will remain; but the spiritual life will be transformed into a better and perfect existence, in which everything we look forward to by faith will be eternal and present. (7, page 127)

He then applies this understanding to all of human history. He says that nations have toppled because of Christ's wrath. Christ, to whom everything will some day be subjected, has already begun the process of subjugation of nations.

. . . Christ has taken a hand in the affairs of the world from the inception of Christianity, has placed countries and peoples under the gospel and toppled and deposed all who opposed this. (7, page 129)

It is interesting to note how Luther has resolved the eschatological tension that one senses in Paul, who put the subjection of the world to Christ entirely in the future, by saying that what Paul promised is already coming true. Wherever nations, rulers, princes, and powers oppose the gospel, the risen Christ throws them down. Christ is the avenger, the destroyer whose secret kingdom supplants and tears down whatever and wherever opposition is met. The prophetic view of God as the refiner's fire is operating full blast here. Luther's language, like Bernard's, is the language of war. The kingdom of goodness is locked in a death struggle with the kingdom of evil, meaning that God is at perpetual war with the world. The two kingdoms, world and spirit, cannot coexist. The temporal kingdom must finally be utterly destroyed. This picture of death and destruction of those who oppose Christ's invisible kingdom is one of the most pessimistic views of secular life I have ever seen. Is there nothing good in the world which God made? Is the secular kingdom totally corrupt? Even though Luther says that the temporal world was ordained by God to temper human perversity, that

is, the proper use of the secular realm, like Paul's use of law, is restraint, it is left without hope of redemption. There is no saving word of hope for the world's transformation, no word of 're-creation' through the perfect love of God who has the power to redeem all evil, only hopelessness and despair. Surely Luther got carried away.

November 3, 1532: I Cor. 15-27.

Having had the chance, perhaps, to reflect on the implication of last week's sermon, something preachers are wont to do, Luther ameliorates the harshness of his interpretation when he writes these words on the last enemy of Christ:

I am fond of having Christ depicted and proclaimed . . . that he is not a man who delights in wrath and punishment and who deals unmercifully with people, but as one who is a king and who has occupied his kingdom for the purpose of battling with all his might against the last enemy until he has cast death under his feet. (8, page 132)

This "disclaimer" has the virtue of at least softening his assertion that Christ is at war with humankind on every front, even though the medieval picture of Christ the stern judge of the world is lurking there in the background.

Death, the Last Enemy of Christ. Luther believes that the destruction of death is foreshadowed by the Resurrection. Christ "demonstrated this enmity with a deed when he trod him underfoot in his own person, so that death is no longer able to harm him." Do we see here the traditional view of the Incarnation, that God was fully present in Christ so as to effect his own Resurrection? This may be confirmed by the fact that he goes on to say that what Christ did for himself, he

will one day do for Christians. Indeed, the life of the Christian is "nothing other than death; as soon as a Christian is baptised, he is thrust into death . . . and all who accept Christ are already sacrificed and sentenced to death. They are like people who have already died and are awaiting their resurrection." That is why the Christian need not fear death. Death and resurrection are enacted in the drama of baptism. Baptism is a kind of dress rehearsal which anticipates what is to come in the future. In baptism Christ "takes the Christian by the hand and pulls him halfway out of the grave; only the left foot remains in it." (9, page 138) This curious way of putting the matter seems to mean that to be buried with Christ in baptism and to rise to newness of life is to experience partial resurrection (all but the left foot has been saved), thus ensuring complete resurrection on the Last Day.

Luther's theology of death, i.e., his reflection on the meaning of Christ's death, is instructive at this point:

. . . it was precisely through death that he drew all things to himself, so that we, too, shall come forth from the grave in him and through him and take all with us that we left behind here. (8, page 133)

Christ is the door through which one passes into eternal life, but taking 'all with us that we left behind'! Luther takes the 'all things' literally, so that you can take it with you in Christ. Compared with the worldly man the Christian is poor indeed. But he can rest assured that one day he will have everything he needs. In the meantime, the Christian may rest assured that he has a greater possession, which is the knowledge gained by faith in Christ of the life to come. Christ is our example. He did not leave even a hair from his head in the grave, which means that he took everything with him. On the other hand, the man of

the world cannot take so much as a penny or a thread of clothing with him. "Show me," Luther challenges, "just one such man in the whole world who ever took as much as a thread with him or again brought it away from death!" (8, page 134) The implication is that worldly wealth is unimportant. The only possession that matters is the consolation gained through the knowledge that Christ is now destroying death "entirely through me and all Christians, thus tearing him to shreds and annihilating him also in my body." What an exalted and moving idea, that the Christian is the means of the inevitable destruction of death itself. In effect, Luther is saying that what was begun in the physical body of Christ will be made complete in his spiritual body, the Christian church.

Enemies of God and the Church. The enemies of God are the world, the devil and the flesh. Luther confuses the issue somewhat by interpreting the 'all things' of verse 27 differently from above. Here they are understood from the point of view of verse 26 to mean enemies of God. God holds the world, the devil and the flesh at bay by means of his Word, Sacrament, and Spirit. God will destroy the flesh "with its avarice and care . . ." (8, page 135), the world by fire (cf. 2 Peter 3:10), and he will also condemn "the devil to eternal fire in hell, for he is God's worst and chief enemy, who instigates every adversity and evil against God's kingdom with lies and murder, also with terror, despair, and unbelief."

The enemies of the church are law, sin, and death. "These are the real enemies. They beset us the worst; and it is through them that the others oppress and harass us." All of these enemies, or so Luther understands Paul, have been subjected to Christ; that is, they have been

vanquished by the Resurrection, although the last enemy still remains. As we have seen, however, death's ultimate destruction is firmly assured through baptism, which is a mystical dying and rising with Christ. In light of that belief, Luther says that "we have this consolation here, that we have a Lord who can and will do away also with this last enemy, tear his fetters and bonds to pieces and furthermore slay and exterminate him." (8, page 136) Death, then, has being; it is the personification of Luther's despair.

Christ, the Champion of Our Cause. Christ, who has already destroyed all the enemies of his person, has taken up the banner for the church. He looks after the faithful. He battles for them. He takes the lead in the battle against world, devil, flesh, sin, law, and even death itself.

Now he reigns in the faith, defeats and kills the same enemies in us uninterruptedly until that Day, when we shall see him destroy death completely and we can no longer find a trace of him and will think that death never existed. Thus we must live in faith today as though there were no sin, no law, no flesh and blood, no world, no devil to harm us, because we have Christ. (8, page 137)

Christ has already won the victory in the faithful, even as he has defeated his enemies in himself. Christ "has weakened them and daily defeats them in us, preventing them from gaining the upper hand, so he also begins to weaken death in us, so that death no longer gains the upper hand in us."

He does not say it, but this whole discussion seems to be an exegetical treatment of the text from I Corinthians 15 based on Romans 8. Throughout this discourse Paul's words shine through: "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God

through Jesus Christ our Lord!" Therein lies the purpose of Christ's kingdom on earth. Christ's "kingdom exists solely for the purpose of helping us against our sin, law and conscience, flesh and blood, world, devil, and especially death." (9, page 139)

For Luther, then, verse 26 is a summary of Paul's theology of resurrection. It is, indeed, the verification of the article on the resurrection of the dead:

This is the text on which St. Paul bases and presents his argument for the confirmation of the article regarding the resurrection of the dead. For since death, too, is called an enemy of Christ, and the very last enemy at that, he must remove death completely and restore to life those whom death has devoured.

Here he also addresses, indirectly at least, the problem raised by theodicy. If God is just, then he will not allow death to go unchecked forever. In Luther's own words, "he must remove death completely and restore to life those whom death has devoured." This would be eschatological verification of God's goodness and justice and holiness. Luther's view of divine justice is revealed in the following statement:

It is certain that God does not think of killing and condemning us, although we are sinners and are deserving of death, but that he is minded like Christ and will remove sin and death from us and destroy these, so that we might inherit eternal righteousness and life; for it is for that reason that he placed Christ into the kingdom. (8, page 139)

Here is the medieval theologian struggling with the problem of death and divine justice. Despite his terror of God, he intuits that God will ultimately manifest mercy and justice on behalf of those who dwell in Christ's secret kingdom. This is little more than his doctrine of justification by faith, in that the invisible God who was made manifest in Christ is the friend who wants to deliver believers from sin and death

through faith in Christ, who suffered and died and rose from the dead for sinners. Those who lack such faith and think to win God's favor through their works (e.g., Turks, papists, and Carthusians) "cannot see God otherwise than as an irate judge who does nothing but make demands of them and who continuously threatens to punish them." (8, page 140) But those, on the other hand, who have faith in the conquering Christ are made aware of the friendship between them and God. God's enmity towards man dissolves in Christ's redeeming act of reconciliation and atonement for human sin. Since Christ has destroyed sin, God's wrath has been appeased. The Christian, therefore, is to "look for all that is good from God the Father who regards you with friendliness and sheer grace, because he works this in Christ and has it present to all through the Word." During this fine moment we can plainly see that Martin Luther had come a long way from his first mass at the altar in the chapel where he looked God in the eye and blinked.

November 10, 1532: I Cor. 15:27-30.

This sermon is essentially an extended comment on verses 27 and 28, on the subjection of all things to God. It continues the ideas of the previous sermons, especially the notion of an invisible kingdom which resides by faith in the heart of believers. After all things are subjected to God, Luther believes, the hidden kingdom of Christ will be revealed and realized on earth. When that happens it will no longer be Christ's kingdom, but God's. Luther recognizes, it would seem, that Paul taught that even Christ himself will be subjected to God and will play a subordinate role in the final act of the drama of salvation. By and large, however,

the church has ever rejected the doctrine of subordinationism, which seems somehow implied by Paul's understanding of the subjection of Christ at the coming of the kingdom in openness and power.

The preacher's interpretation of God as 'all in all' (verse 28) is interesting. This means that humanity will achieve satisfaction in God. That is to say, God will be so fully involved in human life that "we will be satisfied in body and soul and will no longer stand in need of so many things as we now do here on earth." (9, page 142) For example, the multitudinous means of sustaining one's physical nature will be no more. There will be no need of food, drink, shelter, money and other necessities of life. Even the need for government will pass away. God who is all in all will satisfy one's every need. Not only our physical needs but one's spiritual needs will also evaporate. Luther sees an end to the need for the institutionalized church. There will be no need of any ecclesiastical office, including the office of preaching. When God is all in all, perfection will be achieved. "Everybody will be a perfect human being and have all he needs in God, so that he no longer requires father, mother, master, servant, food, clothing, house, etc." (9, page 143) In brief, when God is everything to everyone, "all our needs and wants will be satisfied." (9, page 144) Throughout this discourse we can clearly see Luther, the Christian interpreter, struggling with language to express ineffable ideas. It is as if, as he says later on, that he has attempted to develop a whole new way of speaking, a new language to express the mysterious ways of God. One senses the profound and powerful impact that Luther's rediscovery of the Bible made on his preaching. It transported him from

the safe world of domesticated exegesis into a strange land where landmarks are few and ordinary speech and logic are empty.

November 17, 1532: I Cor. 15:29-32.

In this sermon Luther's spiritual and psychological disposition comes to the forefront. In commenting on verse 30, "Why am I in peril every hour?," it is obvious that he has a strong sense of identification with the feeling of danger underlying the question.

If we profess Christ and live as we should, the world will become our enemy and attack us as it attacks the preachers, so that we may expect no better fate. This is the common external peril of all Christians, of one as well as the other." (10, pages 152-53)

Luther's view of reality is grim. He pictures the Christian as lost and homeless in a vast cosmos which is entirely antagonistic to his existence. Surrounded on all sides by the forces of evil, assailed by supernatural enemies, the Christian has only the armor of faith to protect him. The Christian is a stranger in a strange land, befriended only by Christ.

Verse 32, which treats of the capre diem attitude, is the attitude, according to Luther, of the scoffer and unbeliever, who say, "Oh, the parsons tell us much about death, they paint a gruesome picture of the devil and make hell hot for us. Well, let us have a good drink together while life lasts. When we die, we are dead." (10, page 158) In this vein the world mocks the Word of God. But those who mock now will sing a different tune when they die and go to hell. Luther seems to take an almost perverse satisfaction at the thought of his detractors going to hell:

There they will no longer say as they do now: 'When we are dead, we are dead.' But they will lie in eternal flames and lament and bewail the fact that they were ever born. They will have to curse and damn

themselves for having heard God's Word and for having despised and derided it so blasphemously." (10, page 159)

For Luther the cardinal sin is blasphemy, perhaps, according to Bainton, because he himself had been guilty of it. He quotes Luther as saying that at one time not only did he not love God, he hated God! Bainton says of this: "The word of blasphemy had been spoken. And blasphemy is the supreme sin because it is an offense against the most exalted of all beings, God the majestic."⁸ Luther certainly had changed by the time he wrote this present sermon. Instead of rejecting the wrath of God, which formerly gave rise to his terror and hatred of God, he now seems to revel in it. Concerning the divine wrath and those who sin against the gospel he says, "In the end . . . no one goes unpunished." (10, page 160) God's wrath is just.

One comment needs to be made concerning Luther's vision of divine punishment. It never seems to have occurred to him that this essentially medieval view of hell and eternal punishment formally contradicts Paul's doctrine of the resurrection of the dead. Luther is not speaking of eternal death or punishment at the end of time, but of an immediate consequence of human action following physical death. The idea of resurrection, on the other hand, contradicts the idea of survival of the soul to achieve reward or punishment. According to Paul, and his is the prevailing view of first century Judaism, one dies. The body decays in the ground. On the last day the body/self will be restored. That is resurrection from the dead. The idea of eternal damnation, whose spiritual antecedent is seen in the writings of Plato and the Greeks, presupposing

⁸Ibid., 59.

as it does the survival of something which suffers eternally, cannot stand along side of resurrection. The Greek fathers apparently recognized this discrepancy, since we see in their writings the idea of the resurrection of the soul. For example, Gregory of Nyssa⁹ postulated that the soul would lie immortal and incorruptible with the decayed body in the grave, to be reunited with a restored body at the moment of resurrection. This is evidently not what Luther wants to say.

December 1, 1532: I Cor. 15:33-34.

This sermon is a diatribe against those who would poison the believer's mind by denying the truth of the preaching of the resurrection. Echoing the text, Luther says that they are 'bad company.' His favorite straw man is the bumpkin who says, "Why give ear to what the parsons preach? Do you suppose that another fellow is stuck in this one?" This humorous saying apparently intends to mock the idea that a new person will arise on the Last Day. Evidently it was the common person's way of pointing up the absurdity of a corpse's being reassembled at resurrection. To guard against such loose talk and doubt, Luther admonishes his hearers to arm themselves with the Word of God. The devil is put off by diligent study of the Bible. He echoes I Peter 5 by admonishing the Christian to be watchful and wakeful.

Luther recognizes that the problem Paul experienced in defending his teaching on resurrection was one of interpretation. One of the Corinthian parties understood the doctrine in terms of baptism, "that we had

⁹Gregory of Nyssa, "On the Soul and the Resurrection," in The Fathers of the Church (Washington: Catholic University Press, 1967), 195-272.

all in Baptism arisen spiritually from our dead life in sin and evil works and had now entered into a new, godly, and honorable life." (11, page 167) This opinion, which is common in the exegetical literature, was a natural extension of Paul's thought, in effect a reflection on and enlargement of his own understanding. This fact is well attested by Ephesians and Colossians, which in their present form may not have been written by Paul. Beginning with Ephesians 1:15ff., we find that God has exalted Jesus Christ above every name (verse 21) and has already put all things under his feet. What was once in the future tense is now in the past tense. It has already happened. What, according to Paul, will happen on the Last Day has in fact already happened. (Cf. I Cor. 15:20-28: subjection to Christ is clearly in the future.) In like manner, those who were dead in sin have been made alive by being raised up with Christ, an obvious allusion to burial and rebirth through baptism (2:1ff.). Colossians too, which I believe was written by Paul originally, shows evidence of a revised eschatology, perhaps a redactional correction by a second generation Paulinist. Those who were dead in their trespasses, which itself is singularly un-Pauline terminology, "were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead." (Col. 2:12) This is a subtle, though meaningful, shift in Pauline theology, in effect a 'realized eschatology' that is on the whole alien to Paul himself. One can see, however, how a later generation of Christians might so have interpreted him. If Romans 6 is a universal example of Paul's teaching on baptism, one might conclude that baptism is the paradigm of Christian existence. Under

those circumstances there would be no need to bring in a future resurrection. The future is now.

Luther also objects to the patristic interpretation, which was alluded to above, of resurrection of the soul. The fathers, he says, found their proof in I Cor. 15:50, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. For Luther, however, Paul clearly means to say "that the body that dies now shall come forth again and become alive, just as Christ rose bodily from the grave." (11, page 168) Like Bernard, he interprets 'flesh and blood' as "the lusts and evil which inhere in our flesh and blood from Adam," which shall perish. At the moment of resurrection, the body will be purified of all evil. Here Luther reflects the Manichean notion of the inherent evil of the flesh, an idea that may have entered the main stream of Christian thought by way of Augustine. In any event, the inherent evil of the flesh is foreign to Paul, although it is apparent that he wrestled with the problem.

December 8, 1532: I Cor. 15:35-38.

In this sermon Luther takes the questions which are raised by the text as a starting point to reiterate a favorite theme, to wit: "All that pertains to the essence of . . . temporal goods and is part of temporal life and works will cease to be." (12, page 172) He takes the questions to be those of Paul's opponents who ask: What sort of an existence will it be? Where will all the people live? What will they eat? Will the earth be able to support everyone who had died and been raised to life?

These may be common objections made by Luther's opponents, or at least reflective of the doubt of his day, but that is not what Paul means. As I tried to show in Chapter 2, in this section Paul employs the rhetorical device of the interlocutor to set up a kind of imaginary opponent. His answer shows that his main concern is to demonstrate the conviction that God will give to each person a new body as he chooses (verse 39). It is not to show that the temporal realm, with all its worldly needs and concerns, will vanish.

It is interesting to note in passing that Luther, unlike Paul, believes that in the future life there will be a differentiation of sexes. He says, "For Scripture says that God created male and female. He will not change his creation. Therefore everyone's body will remain as it was created." (12, page 171) This notion goes against the plain meaning of the text, which clearly says that God will give to each a new body. God is not stuck, so to speak, with any of his former handiwork. He is omnipotent and can and will create bodies de novo, or so I understand Paul.

December 22, 1532: I Cor. 15:35-38.

In the introduction to the thirteenth sermon, which uses the same text as the previous one and focuses on the seed (body) to be sown, we see once more Luther's attitude toward Scripture as the Word of God and the presupposition he holds regarding the persuasiveness of the examples from nature which are employed by Paul in his argument. Scripture's literal word is to be taken without question, because it is God speaking. Biblical illustrations, such as the ones Paul uses in the text, are only persuasive if one accepts uncritically the doctrine which is being

illustrated. This seems to mean that illumination follows dogma. Luther says,

For whoever will not believe or cannot be persuaded by God's Word and the example or experience of the resurrection initiated in Christ, will very likely be preached to in vain by illustrations and examples. It should suffice a Christian to hear God's Word declare that he will come forth from the earth alive, with body, soul, and all sense. He should regard that as true and certain because God said it. He should not inquire further how this will happen but leave that to God. For He who is able to raise all the dead from the earth with one word will surely know how to bestow a form and an essence that will serve and be appropriate to the heavenly, eternal life. (13, page 176)

Two comments need to be made. This quotation clearly shows that Luther believed in the general resurrection. 'All the dead' will be raised from the earth. Second, his hermeneutical principle pertaining to the acceptance of illustrations of already established truths reminds one of the notion that the hearing of the word of God through preaching is a prerequisite of divine illumination. One is reminded of Jonathan Edwards in this regard, who once said:

The mind cannot see the excellency of any doctrine, unless that doctrine be first in the mind; but seeing the excellence of the doctrine may be immediately from the Spirit of God, though the conveying of the doctrine . . . may be by the word. So that the notions which are the subject-matter of this light, are conveyed to the mind by the word of God; but that due sense of the heart, wherein this light formally consists, is immediately by the Spirit of God. As, for instance, the notion that there is a Christ, and that Christ is holy and gracious, is conveyed to the mind by the word of God: but the sense of the excellency of Christ, by reason of that holiness and grace, is nevertheless, immediately the work of the Holy Spirit.¹⁰

In both Edwards and Luther, the double action of the Holy Spirit who mediates truth through the words of the preacher and at the same time

¹⁰ Jonathan Edwards, Puritan Sage (New York: Library Publishers, 1953), 163.

provides an immediate sense of divine truth by conveying it to the mind directly, is in evidence. The mind cannot perceive what it has not been prepared to perceive, neither can faith accept what it has not been ordained by God to accept. The mind is limited in perception by virtue of its lack of spiritual preparation. At this point the role of the preacher is indispensable, for it is the preacher's task to prepare heart and mind for the reception of the gospel. This is evidently what Luther means when he implies that belief precedes illumination.

God the "Grim Sower". Luther pictures God as a peasant scattering seeds in the earth. God "has a sack about his neck filled with seed. We human beings are that seed . . ." (14, page 176) God takes the seed by the handful and carts them into the cemeteries. Rather than the case of "the end and everlasting decay," as it appears to us, God "does this solely in order that his little kernels might emerge again most beautifully during the pleasant coming summer following this miserable existence." (13, page 177) Christians must take comfort in this thought, "that it is not a matter of burial and decay but of sowing or planting a little kernel, or seed, by God himself."

Towards A New Speech. What all of this means is that one can no longer speak and think in traditional categories. The fact of Christ's Resurrection and one's eventual salvation in a similar fashion, has convinced Luther that ordinary means of expression are bankrupt. He writes:

We must have it impressed on us that this is a matter not of dying and decaying but of sowing and planting and that in this very act there is to be a coming forth again and a growing into a new, everlasting, and perfect life and existence. In the future we will have to learn a new speech and language when referring to death and

the grave. When we die, this does not really mean death but seed sown for the coming summer. And the cemetery or burial ground does not indicate a heap of the dead, but a field full of kernels, known as God's kernels, which will verdantly blossom forth again and grow more beautifully than can be imagined. (13, page 178)

In brief, and despite all the evidence to the contrary, "Life is emerging from death everywhere."

This passage somehow reminds one of Bernard, who also thought in terms of winter and summer, that this is the 'winter of our discontent.' But spring and summer are right behind, a time of blossoming and of new life. Luther avows that the passage of the seasons, from the death of winter to the new life of spring, illustrates the truth of the resurrection. His language is starkly beautiful:

For since He produces such beautiful new vegetation year after year from a dead kernel and seed, he is much more disposed to do the same with us when we similarly lie buried under the ground and the time comes for an eternal summer to dawn. Then we will come forth far more beautiful and glorious. (13, page 180)

From this familiar illustration, he turns to another, the resurrection as illustrated by the creative power of God. He argues that since God once created us out of nothing, how much more will he be able to give our bodies a new form, one that is 'far more beautiful and glorious.'

And since he once before created us from nothing, he can also again give us life from the grave and give the body a new form. For it surely denotes greater skill to make something out of nothing than to renew and beautify what existed previously. (13, page 182)

That is why Luther can say in conclusion that death serves God's ultimate purposes. Even death, powerful as it is, serves the living God.

God wants to create a new life for the very purpose that all that is perishable be entirely abolished. Death must serve that purpose. He must approach us and say: 'Stop eating, drinking, digesting, etc., and

lie down and decompose so that you may acquire a new, more beautiful form, just as the grain does which sprouts anew from the soil. (13, page 182)

January 19, 1533: I Cor. 15:39-43.

This discourse, which is concerned with various kinds of flesh and celestial and terrestrial bodies, begins with a recapitulation of the illustration of the seed which is sown. Here is how he summarizes the meaning of Paul's example:

By the first illustration he showed us sufficiently that the new body will acquire a new form in the resurrection; this will be more beautiful and glorious than the present one. It is comparable to the kernel that grows forth again from the ground and is far more beautiful after it has decayed. It will be a new mode of existence, free of all temporal necessities, finding its full sufficiency in God alone. (14, page 183)

This vision of a 'new mode of existence' is predicated on the belief in resurrection of the flesh, as we see here and in the sermon which follows.

Concerning the various types of animal flesh and planetary bodies, stars and the like, Luther understands Paul to be saying that each restored body will be different from the others. Some, such as the apostles, will outshine the others. This seems to be a misunderstanding of Paul, who was simply comparing the earthly body to the heavenly body. He was not necessarily attempting to differentiate among the various heavenly bodies, that is, the earthly bodies that are to be transformed, so much as he was trying to show how different the heavenly body will be from the earthly body we now possess. The resurrection body, Paul implied, will be as different from the earthly body as, let us say, a fish is from a bird, or the sun is from the moon. The resurrection body will be unique.

As I implied, Luther's presupposition of the resurrection of the flesh gets in the way of interpretation. Against the plain meaning of the text, which must be understood in light of verse 50, he says that to call the resurrected body a spiritual body

does not imply that it no longer has physical life or flesh and blood. No, then it could not be called a true body. But when it is called a spiritual body, this means that it will have life and yet not be a body that eats, sleeps, digests, but a body that is nourished and preserved spiritually by God and has life entirely in him. (14, page 189)

At the risk of oversimplification, I see this view as another example of dogmatic exegesis based on an unquestioned assumption about the way things are. In this case, Luther cannot see that Paul was effectively denying resurrection (read 'restoration') of the flesh. Luther assumes, of course, that God as 'all in all' could maintain physical life and flesh and blood without the need to eat and drink and eliminate, perhaps to maintain the belief in personal immortality: those who will be resurrected will be exactly as they were. But as we have already seen, for Paul resurrection of the body means personal immortality and identity. The body/self who was will one day be again. Personal, self-same immortality through resurrection seems assured in the context of Paul's teaching as a whole. 'Resurrection of the flesh' is not demanded by the view of personal immortality through bodily resurrection.

February 1, 1533: I Cor. 15:44-53.

As he is wont to do, Luther summarizes the preceding sermon in his opening remarks: "The corruptible, dishonorable, and weak is sown that it might arise incorruptible and in glory and power, and that the animal,

terrestrial body might become a spiritual, celestial body." (15, page 191) The practical effect of all this is the encouragement and comfort we may receive from such knowledge. Of this knowledge he writes:

For this serves to warm our hearts to the idea and to forget the temporal life, lest we cling to it as though we want to remain here forever, as the world does. Then we will find our comfort and our reliance in something loftier than in this life and transitory goods. which are, after all, uncertain from hour to hour. We must rather get used to comforting and delighting ourselves with the lofty and inexpressible treasure which we shall receive. (15, page 191)

Again, to echo Ernest Becker, preaching on the resurrection as assurance of immortality has the effect of 'heroizing' the powerless of the earth 'simply by taking a step back from the world into another dimension of things, the dimension called heaven.'

In our discussion of the fourteenth sermon we saw that Luther employs the traditional interpretation of resurrection by arguing that the God who created a man out of nothing could surely raise one from the dead and give one a new form. In this sermon another idea is introduced, which is perhaps implied by Paul's use of the illustration from Genesis 2, the creation of Adam. Luther is evidently comfortable with contradictory notions when he says:

If God can make a living person with all his members and powers from this dirt, should he not also be able to form a spiritual, celestial body from the present natural body, which already possesses the nature or essence of the body? (15, page 192)

The phrase 'essence of the body' provides a clue to Luther's view of identity. The essence or natural qualities of the physical body will be preserved without the concomitant needs and wants of the flesh. That is why he can say, "This constitutes a life far different from the present natural one. And yet it remains the same body or person." This is true to the text as far as it goes. But does this necessarily mean that the

resurrected body will consist in the flesh? Does Paul himself not say that the body/person will be transformed? As I have already indicated, according to Paul the new body/person will be unique, not as Luther believes "a true and genuine body of flesh and blood . . ." (15, page 193) To repeat what was said above, Luther seems intent on denying the idea of resurrection of the soul, i.e., 'spiritual resurrection' through baptism, at the expense of resurrection of the body, i.e., 'physical resurrection' of the flesh. For Paul this is not an alternative. The body/soul, understood as one person, will be transformed, so that in effect the 'flesh' will be taken off or removed. His maxim is that 'flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God,' which means that that which is perishable (the 'flesh') will not be preserved. Why this is true, Paul does not say. What he does say is that this physical body of flesh and blood will be transformed into an as yet unknown body of spirit. A careful reading of Luther shows that he himself senses this. He verges several times on breaking his exegetical bonds and seeing Paul's point, for example in his discussion of bearing the essence and image of the celestial Christ. (15, page 196) But his preoccupation with natural essence and the flesh keeps pulling him back to the same starting place: flesh and blood, albeit in purified form, will inherit the kingdom of God. This is an outstanding example of reversing the meaning of the text completely in order to support one's previously held theological position. It is defense of orthodoxy with a vengeance.

Luther returns to the discussion of 'resurrection of the soul' vis a vis 'resurrection of the body' in his comment on verses 46 and 47, when he says:

Here you note that St. Paul always juxtaposes the two expressions 'natural body' and 'spiritual body.' He does this lest someone understand this to mean . . . that only the spirit, or the soul, will rise and be saved on the Last Day and that the body will remain in the ground. (15, page 193)

As the discussion which follows this comment makes clear, Luther equates 'resurrection of the body' and 'resurrection of the flesh.' He agrees with those whom he brands 'heretics,' that there is a resurrection of the spirit, but not to the exclusion of the body, which is equated with the flesh. Therefore, he concludes: "I believe in the resurrection, not only of the spirit--as the heretics said--but also of that very flesh, or body, which we bear on our necks." (15, page 197) If we allow in general that there really is a resurrection of the dead, that God would include the 'burden' of flesh in his plan of redemption seems somehow incredible. But such is the power of dogma, that Luther can claim that Paul "teaches nothing but what these . . . words contain and convey: 'resurrection of the flesh'."

What, then, does verse 50 mean, if it does not mean what it says? Luther believes that

the term 'flesh and blood' really applies to the old man in accordance with reason, as descended from flesh and blood, who no longer knows or understands anything, who is without faith and God's Word and without Christ. (15, page 198)

He does support, however, the popular belief in a general physical resurrection. Even "Judas, Caiaphas, and all the damned, will rise physically, but they will not enter God's kingdom." Only those whose flesh "has been purified by Christ in Baptism will be received into God's kingdom."

In a sense, Luther's view of the effect of Baptism on the flesh is similar to the medieval view of the transformation of the eucharistic elementa sacra. In speaking of the purification of the flesh through

Baptism, he says, "Therefore it can no longer simply be called flesh and blood, except in an external and physical sense." Internally, through Baptism, the flesh has already been essentially transformed, i.e., it has partaken of the nature of an undying substance. A kind of transubstantiation of the flesh has been effected per lavacrum, thereby giving new meaning to the term 'spiritual rebirth.' This transformation is analogous to what the medieval theologians said happened to the bread and wine ('flesh and blood') of Christ with the repetition of the words: Hoc est corpus meum, etc. One senses that this ideology underlies Luther's understanding of resurrection of the flesh. Luther has modified Paul's dictum to read, flesh and blood in its present form cannot inherit the kingdom of God.

As we have already pointed out, Luther makes a distinction between death and sleep. In commenting on verses 51 through 53, which speak of the simultaneous transformation of the living and the dead, he concludes, against the plain meaning of the text, that the words 'we shall not all sleep' do not negate the fact that all must die. He says that these words mean "that those who are struck in the final hour will not depart this life as a person does otherwise on his deathbed, nor will they be placed in a grave or buried under the soil." (15, page 200) This condition, of being 'placed in a grave or buried under the soil,' he likens to sleep in the Scriptural sense, which he takes as the appearance of death only. The rest will be 'struck in the final hour.' In other words, 'we shall not all sleep,' i.e., be put in the grave, but we must all die! This somewhat tortured logic may be apologetic in scope. It effectively avoids the embarrassment that resurrection of the dead did not happen in

Paul's lifetime. It is apparent that Paul believed that resurrection would happen within the lifetime of those who were still living in the mid-fifties. Paul's prophecy was simply not fulfilled. Everyone died.

Finally, Luther does not understand the word ἀλλοίωσις very well. His exegetical error is to interpret the present passage in light of I Thessalonians 4:13-18. By that light he says that "the Greek word found here means chiefly to change to dry land, from the earth into the air." (15, page 200) But this is an interpretation of the Greek word based on the imagery of I Thessalonians. It fails to take account of the context of the present passage and instead harmonizes the two texts. What Paul seems to be saying is that suddenly and miraculously both living and dead Christians will be transformed into the image or likeness of Christ. The idea is that God will create new bodies of his own choice, bodies whose essence will not be subject to decay. They will be imperishable and immortal. But this does not happen before the resurrection. One may argue against Luther, that according to Paul there is no essential spirituality of the Christian body which was effected by baptism before the final act of the drama of God's new creation unfolds. Up to that point there is no essential difference, i.e., difference by nature, between Christians and non-Christians. Only at certain call will Christians rise triumphant over death, when Christ himself effects a spiritual transformation of the physical body.

April 14, 1533: I Cor. 15:54-56.

In this brief sermon, Luther gives the idea of the preceding discourse a little different twist. There we saw that he believes that

through Baptism a kind of mystical transformation of one's physical nature has already taken place, a kind of 'transubstantiation of the flesh' which assures one's immortality. Here the image is changed, but the substance of the argument remains the same. This sermon, too, is on victory over death.

Here he likens death to the devil's poison, whose antidote is Baptism and the Eucharist. One can readily see that this idea is reminiscent of Ignatius to the Ephesians (20:2), wherein the Eucharist is likened to a medicine of immortality or an antidote against death. Luther sounds as if he knows that letter when he says, "Thus we have drunk a salutary medicine in baptism and the Sacrament, which expels and removes our poison." (16, page 205) In other words, what is a purgative or medicine to believers is poison to the devil, since its counteracting effects destroy the disease of death. The devil, who is the lord of death, is thereby rendered powerless.

April 27, 1533: I Cor. 15:56-67.

Luther continues his discussion of eventual victory over death in this summary of the preceding sermon. With reference to Isaiah 25:8, "Death is swallowed up in victory," which is quoted by Paul in verse 54, Luther says:

That is the victory by which death is to be swallowed up, so that we need fear death no longer or remain in it. For the heart is already saturated by the gospel, which shall be poison and pestilence to death. It weakens death from day to day and deprives him of his strength, until he is submerged entirely and disappears. (17, page 206)

This process, which was initiated by Christ's victory over death, will be completed on the Last Day. In the meantime, we "await the hour . . . and

. . . defiantly rely on Christ by faith over against sin, death, and hell." (17, page 207) Final victory through Christ is assured by these verses (54-57), which are "a brief sermon on the power of Christ's Resurrection."

Luther turns at last to discuss what earlier he has called present enemies, namely, sin, death, and the law. Sin is death's "spear and cannon ball, indeed death's thunder and lightning, through which he carries out his work." (17, page 208) Sin gets its power to kill by virtue of its relation to law. Paul's word, that 'the power of sin is the law,' means that the law "renders sin alert and strong and prompts it to act and to pierce. If it depended on us, sin would very likely remain dormant forever. But God is able to awaken it effectively through law." Luther assumes, as Paul did, that God uses the law to strike at the window of one's conscience and reveal one's violation of the commandments. That is to say, the function of law is conviction. One is declared guilty of sin by the law. The law, which was created by God, has the beneficent effect of awakening one from death in sin, thereby forcing one to seek salvation. To borrow the image of the sixteenth sermon, by revealing one's disease, the sinfulness of the human condition, God forces one to take the medicine of immortality. Luther says of the appearance of the law:

But when the law appears, it shows us that we are completely steeped in sin and lying in God's wrath, so that we must say, as St. Bernard says of himself: 'I thought I was sitting in a rose garden, and am not aware that I am sitting among murderers'." (17, page 210)

This rather cryptic comment of Bernard's seems to mean what we have already seen is characteristic of the human condition from his viewpoint, that we live in the midst of sin and death. For Bernard the way out was by virtue of a 'work,' namely, charity, humility and penance. But for Luther, nothing

one can do makes any difference. He is death on 'works righteousness.' Instead, the victory has already been won through Jesus Christ, who stood in one's place and took the law, sin and death upon himself. Christ has voluntarily atoned for one's transgressions. He "has come and has assumed and borne our sin and death, which we had justly deserved."

At this point in his discourse, Luther evidences no radical departure from traditional atonement theology. But suddenly he develops a notion which, quite frankly, is astonishing. He says that Christ even went so far as to "call himself a sinner in Scripture." He is alluding to Psalm 41:4, which reads: "As for me, I said, 'O Lord, be gracious to me; heal me, for I have sinned against thee!'" According to Luther, this is Christ speaking to God! This means that Christ has literally and really stood in our place; whatever sinners did against God to deserve death, Christ also did. This radical departure from the orthodox notion of the sinlessness of Christ means that "the law attached itself to him and condemned him, sin crucified him and pierced him to death, and death carried him under the sod." (17, page 211) They ultimately failed, however, because Christ emerged victorious from the grave. "Now they are overcome for us and no longer have any right to or power over us. In that way we have complete victory in Christ, now spiritually by faith but later also physically and visibly." Christians, therefore, can join in a song of victory "and in that way always celebrate Easter, praising and extolling God for a victory that was not won or achieved in battle by us . . . but was presented and given to us by the mercy of God." But here Luther stops short of unconditional and unqualified grace through faith: "The only condition is that we must accept this

sincerely and not give God the lie, as they do who presume to overcome their sin and death by themselves." (17, page 213)

That is how Luther concludes his defense of the article pertaining to the resurrection of the dead. It is apparent that he ends his comments on I Corinthians 15 with his favorite theological doctrine, justification by the grace of God through faith in Christ and, yes, in Scripture. His conclusion is marred somewhat by making faith something one must do. Unwittingly, perhaps, he has made faith a work. But is not faith our response to God's gift of love? Faith is not demanded by God, but freely given and therefore freely received, or so I have been taught.

If one note is consistently sounded throughout this series of sermons, it is the note of victory over death. The entire composition may be seen as a variation on the theme of the power of Christ's Resurrection to effect salvation in this present world by overcoming our age old enemies of sin and death. The emphasis, therefore, is not on death itself but victory over death. Luther is not so much interested in what is going to happen after death as he is in the quality of life of the Christian in this present world. It is a world characterized by sin and death under the tutelage of the law. But an act of divine grace has set the world on its head, so that these seemingly invincible opponents to righteousness and salvation are ultimately doomed. Christ's victory gives the lie to their power to hurt. One may rest assured in their ultimate defeat, since the seeds of their destruction have already been sown, so that one may live today victoriously. With Paul, Luther affirms: Thanks be to God who gives us the victory in Jesus Christ! At the same time, Luther has given us a vision of the future, a state in which physical needs and wants will be

perfectly transformed by God who will be all in all. He points the way to a perfect state of existence in which strife and struggle will cease. He suggest that a whole new way of expression, a new speech, will have to be invented to describe this new way of life. He thereby reminds us that language is finally incapable of expressing the meaning of eternity. We speak in an enigma wrapped in a mystery. In matters of eternity and immortality, language can only suggest; it cannot describe.

JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ALONE

Luther, as we have seen, understood the sermon to be a decisive encounter with God, not merely as preparation for that encounter in the confessional. That is to say, for Luther the sermon functioned in terms of relationship as a holistic activity of preacher, congregation and the Spirit of God. As an event which revealed the eternal will of God in the "now" of the congregation's existence, the sermon had a sacramental quality. The purpose of preaching was seen in its effect of bringing salvation by mediating the grace of God. The only "requirement" on the part of the hearer was the reception of God's grace in faith, which was itself seen as a gift of the Holy Spirit, a gift of the understanding, will and divine affection.

Luther's contribution to the history of Christian interpretation, especially in the Protestant tradition, is reminiscent of Chrysostom and the school of Antioch, which history teaches was a direct descendent of Palestinian Judaism. He understood that it is the task of the expositor to seek the precise meaning of the text but within the context of the entire Bible. One might say that for Luther the Bible was to be read as a whole book and was not to be seen as a series of isolated texts. This

was his inheritance from the mood of classical Humanism. Furthermore, Luther insisted that preaching must have a clearcut purpose, which was in his sermons on I Corinthians 15 defense of the Creed and other fundamental articles of preaching. It was this programmatic approach to preaching which gave his sermons their power.

While the Reformation slogan sola scriptura, which was evident in Luther's preaching, may be modified in matters of current Christian interpretation by the equal values of tradition as the appeal to history, reason as critical exegetical and theological reflection, and personal experience as God's immediate converse with humankind, still the Bible has a central role today as the source and norm of Christian preaching. The slogan sola fidei, on the other hand, is of lasting and unadulterated value to the task of contemporary preaching, which may be seen as an attempt to make God known by proclaiming his rule of righteousness, holiness, justice, and love. Faith justifies, which means that faith brings freedom and the forgiving grace of God. Preaching in faith in the Resurrection, then, is proclaiming the forgiving word of a loving God in the midst of guilt and pain, thereby freeing persons to love. As Dillenberg has written of Luther's view of faith, it means "a fundamental reorientation and redirection of life. The life of faith is the mode of existence which finds its vital source and center in God's forgiving and renewing grace."¹¹ The central if not the sole locus of faith is the act of Christian proclamation.

¹¹ Martin Luther, Martin Luther: Selections From His Writings, ed. John Dillenberg (New York: Doubleday, 1961), XXVIII.

Chapter 6

JOHN WESLEY: HOMO UNIUS LIBRI

The establishment of Methodism in the eighteenth century, indeed of the revivalistic and evangelical mood of the times, is attributable in part to the preaching of John Wesley. Brilioth¹ has characterized Wesley's preaching in terms of bringing to life the biblical text, united with a zeal for sanctification which left its imprint on ethics. Wesley emerges in the history of preaching as the embodiment of the consciousness of a special call to preach the gospel to the poor and disinherited. Methodism's pure proclamation of the gospel became a tremendous social and political force, in combination with a strong emphasis on aiming the divine imperative directly at the individual. As an example of the social power of Wesleyan revivalism, one may cite Alfred North Whitehead. The Methodist preachers, he says, "made the conception of the brotherhood of man and of the importance of men, a vivid reality. They had produced the final effective force which hereafter made slavery impossible among progressive races." (AI, p. 28) This sweeping generalization is indicative of the ethical dimension of Wesley's doctrine of sanctification, or going on to perfection, a doctrine central in the preaching of Wesley and his followers.

Wesley himself, however, believed that he was engaged in one task, and that was to find the way to heaven.

I want to know one thing: the way to heaven, how to land safe on that happy shore. God himself has condescended to teach the way; for this

¹Yngve Brilioth, A Brief History of Preaching (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965).

very end he came from heaven. He hath written it down in a book. O give me that book! At any price give me the book of God! I have it: here is knowledge enough for me. Let me be homo unius libri.²

In the discussion of Wesley's sermons I propose to show that at the heart of his homiletical labor is the Resurrection-resurrection as divine power. It is the risen Christ who leads the faithful on to perfection, which is understood both as a present reality in the midst of death and decay, a kind of life-giving force which exalts the believer in the present moment, and as a future reality when love is consummated on the day of resurrection.

SERMON I: "SALVATION BY FAITH" (EPH. 2:8)

What is faith? The locus of faith is Christ. Faith is the confession that God has raised Christ from the dead and is therefore saving faith. The Christian confession of faith

acknowledges the necessity and merit of his death, and the power of his resurrection. It acknowledges his death as the only sufficient means of redeeming man from death eternal, and his resurrection as the restoration of us all to life and immortality . . . (1, V, 9)³

Christian faith is, therefore, "a full reliance on the blood of Christ; a trust in the merits of his life, death, and resurrection . . ." Salvation by faith, then, is trust in Christ as the guarantor of life and immortality of the faithful. At the heart of salvation by faith is the

²John Wesley, Sermons on Several Occasions, 1st ser.; (London: Epworth Press, 1971), vi.

³The sermons, which are one hundred and forty-one in number, are bound in John Wesley The Works of John Wesley (Grand Rapids; Zondervan, 1958), Vol. V, VI, VII. All quotations are referred to by series, volume and page number.

power of the Resurrection, in combination with Christ's work on the cross which is able to save man from death itself. But man is a sinner, locked up in a body of death. Faith, therefore, also saves one from sin and the consequences of sin. That is to say, faith saves the believing soul from the power of sin, which is guilt and fear of death. Salvation by faith

implies a deliverance from guilt and punishment, by the atonement of Christ actually applied to the soul of the sinner now believing in him, and a deliverance from the power of sin, through Christ formed in his heart. (1, V, 12)

Faith in the Cross removes guilt and fear; faith in the Resurrection removes the power of sin. Together, the Cross and Resurrection remove all hindrances to salvation by abolishing guilt and fear of death and punishment. Salvation is mediated through faith in the Cross and Resurrection.

Here we see the logical sequence of faith in Christ, especially the power of his death and Resurrection. Salvation by faith is a somewhat systematic application of confession in the redemptive qualities of the Cross and Resurrection. This means that at the heart of salvation or justification, according to Wesley, is the saving efficacy of the events commemorated on Good Friday and Easter. This recognition led Carl Michalson to argue:

If there is a central theme in the preaching of Wesley, it is the saving event, the cross-resurrection event, the new birth, the hyphenation of cross-resurrection in justification-new birth.⁴

This 'central theme' in turn leads us back to the purpose of preaching, according to Wesley, which we noted is to discover what the Bible says 'concerning the way to heaven,' or how to achieve immortality and life eternal. Immortality, which may be interpreted as life after death, is,

⁴Carl Michalson, The Hinge of History (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959), 210.

as we shall see, ultimately concerned with the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead. In "On the Resurrection of the Dead," a sermon which will be examined below, it is clear that immortality and resurrection are synonymous. Therefore one might say that the purpose of preaching from Wesley's viewpoint is to explicate what the Bible has to say on resurrection as the end and means of all one's striving. Resurrection of the dead is predicated on the appropriation of the power of Jesus' death and Resurrection in this present life in order that the consequences of sin might be overcome today. It is assured by the paschal event. To paraphrase Wesley, salvation by faith in the power of the Cross and Resurrection "is, and must be, the foundation of all our preaching: that is, must be preached first." (1, V, 15)

What must be kept in mind, however, is that Wesley operates on two levels of belief at the same time. There is the ultimate disposition of the believer in eternity, as well as the efficacy of Christ's salvation in the present. Salvation is incomplete without new life in the present. Salvation is understood in terms of the saving efficacy of the Resurrection which is manifest in the sinner who has been born again. That is why above we saw that Michalson speaks of the 'cross-resurrection event' in terms of 'justification-new birth.' The dual effect of salvation in the life of the Christian is well illustrated by the following words of encouragement:

Though thou be as helpless and weak as an infant of days, the strong man shall not be able to stand before thee. Thou shalt prevail over him, and subdue him, and overthrow him, and trample him under thy feet. Thou shalt march on, under the great Captain of thy salvation, 'conquering and to conquer,' until all thine enemies are destroyed, and 'death is swallowed up in victory.' (1, V, 16)

The quotation of I Corinthians 15:54 is not unimportant. In this sermon, the root and the fruit of Wesley's preaching are evident. The root is salvation by faith. The fruit is eternal life, which is understood both as a presently realizable condition and a future reality. This militant mood of moving on to victory, until at last death itself is overthrown, is a symbolic way of speaking of the meaning of immortality which is offered now through faith in Christ. Thus a progressive view of eternal life is intended, with the new birth now, and later on the realization of life everlasting in the form of resurrection of the dead. That is to say, according to Paul death itself will be destroyed on the day of resurrection. Is it possible that Wesley had in mind the content of verse 53, which is a condition for the coming to pass of the logos of the prophet who predicted the destruction of death? When this perishable and mortal nature is clothed in that which is imperishable and immortal, then the prophecy will be fulfilled. Paul is speaking of resurrection of the body. It is not unreasonable to speculate that Wesley's recognition of the progressive nature of the Christian life led him to see that the end of justification is resurrection, which begins with confession of faith in the power of Christ's Resurrection. Like Luther, whose eschatology he may have studied, Wesley preached that the ultimate purpose of salvation by faith is resurrection of the body, not immortality of the soul. As if to acknowledge his debt to Luther, Wesley mentions him in the conclusion as the one who revived the doctrine of justification by faith alone.

SERMON III: "AWAKE, THOU THAT SLEEPEST" (EPH. 5:14)

We have already seen in the first sermon that for Wesley salvation is by faith in the Cross and Resurrection which removes the power of sin, thereby releasing the believer from the fear of death and divine punishment. This understanding lies at the heart of his preaching program, whose purpose is to reveal what the Bible says about eternal life. Our interpretation of Wesley's thought leads us to propose that the end of salvation is resurrection of the dead, a concept which is descriptive both of life in the present and life after death. This present sermon is a moral interpretation of resurrection. Its purpose is to describe the human condition as a kind of living death: in the midst of life, the 'sleeper' is dead in sin. In accordance with the mood of his times, Wesley pictures the resurrection as a kind of awakening. We are asleep in sin and "herein we remain till the Second Adam becomes a quickening Spirit to us, till he raises the dead, the dead in sin, in pleasure, riches, or honours." (1, V, 27) Again, the Manichaeian notion of resurrection from sin is in evidence.

Wesley's reference to the 'Second Adam' leads one to believe that he is thinking of I Corinthians 15. This supposition is confirmed by his comparison of 'natural man' with 'spiritual man,' which is reminiscent of Paul's discussion of the 'earthly' man vis a vis the 'heavenly' man in I Cor. 15:45-49. It is the 'natural man' who is dead in sin; the 'spiritual man' is alive to God, since he has been raised from the dead. The natural man, unlike the other, has no "spiritual sense, no inlets of spiritual knowledge . . ." He is as unlike spiritual man as a dead body is to a living body.

Given the human condition, that natural man is dead in sin, and given the text of the sermon ('Awake, o sleeper, and arise from the dead . . .'), it can be readily seen that the task of the preacher is to wake the sleeper up. Wesley, therefore, implores all those who sleep to wake up, to flee the wrath to come, and be prepared to meet eternity. He calls for nothing less than a 'great awakening,' couched in terms of a spiritual resurrection, which is the prelude to the final judgment of God. His language is fairly apocalyptic: "My brethren, it is high time for us to awake out of sleep, before the 'great trumpet of the Lord be blown,' and our land become a field of blood." (1, V, 36) Here is the preacher functioning as an eschatological prophet who warns his people of impending danger in the form of divine judgment.

SERMON V: "JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH" (ROM. 4:5)

This sermon further delineates the problem of the human condition, that humanity is dead in sin as a consequence of Adam's disobedience. For Wesley the doctrine of original sin implies a spiritual death, that is, death of the soul, as well as material death, or death of the body. In any event, the problem is death and how to overcome it. Of Adam he says:

For the moment he tasted that fruit, he died. His soul died, was separated from God; separate from whom the soul has no more life than the body has when separate from the soul. His body, likewise, became corruptible and mortal; so that death then took hold on this also. And being already dead in spirit, dead to God, dead in sin, he hastened on to death everlasting; to the destruction both of body and soul, in the fire never to be quenched. (1, V, 55)

Death is, therefore, a consequence of the sin of Adam. This means, according to the preacher, that "all are dead, dead to God, dead in sin, dwelling

in a corruptible, mortal body, shortly to be dissolved, and under the sentence of death eternal." (1, V, 55) Is there no hope?

Christ's work on the Cross is the saving factor in this grim picture. If the problem of natural human existence is that humanity exists in a state of death as a consequence of the first man's disobedience, then the solution to the dilemma lies in the sacrifice of Christ, through which humanity is offered the way of life unto God. Wesley seems to be saying that by Christ's atoning death a new condition or state of existence has been created. As a direct result of the sacrifice of his beloved Son, God has pledged "to remit the punishment due to our sins, to reinstate us in his favor, and to restore our dead souls to spiritual life, as the earnest of life eternal." (1, V, 55)

We can see, then, that in the 'first Adam' one's lot is eternal death. In the 'second Adam' it is eternal life. In the first Adam the image of God was destroyed. In the second Adam it is restored. Wesley is using Paul's language of resurrection when he speaks of the restoration of dead souls to spiritual life. This enables one to cry with Christ, 'Abba . . . Father!' For Wesley there is no more profound assurance of the saving efficacy of the atoning grace of the Cross and the miraculous, life-giving power of the Resurrection, than his adoption as a son of God. To be able to call God 'Father' is the highest privilege imaginable. It is to witness to the fact of redemption and the saving efficacy of the Cross-Resurrection which represents new life in the human soul. This spirit of adoption inheres in Christ's atoning act on the Cross and is integrally related to justification by faith. Wesley says:

By the sin of the first Adam . . . we all fell short of the favor of God . . . Even so, by the sacrifice for sin made by the Second Adam, as the Representative of us all, God is so far reconciled to all the world, that he hath given them a new covenant . . . (1, V, 56)

This 'new covenant' Wesley calls the 'covenant of grace,' which is the assurance of personal salvation. Justification by faith is, therefore, "a sure trust and confidence that Christ died for my sins, that he loved me and gave himself for me." (1, V, 60-61) This would mean that justification by faith has a personal or 'existential' dimension, as well as an ontological dimension. That is to say, the Cross-Resurrection as justification-new birth not only restores the wholeness of being itself, but also lifts the individual sinner out of the depths of death and despair. Christ is pro me. Justification is an act of cosmic significance whereby God restores one to the covenant of grace by adopting one as a child of divine grace.

This view is borne out by Wesley's third sermon on faith, called "The Righteousness of Faith" (Series 1, V, Sermon VI; Rom. 10:5-8) Again we see the homiletical presupposition of man's inherent sinfulness. Man is a sinner, according to Wesley, whose every effort to save himself results in sinking deeper and deeper into sin. The only way out of the mire is through faith in the only-begotten Son of God, through whom one enters into the covenant of grace, which is a covenant "of free love, of undeserved mercy . . ." (1, V, 74) God adopts the repentant sinner by means of the covenant of grace through faith in Christ.

Thus Wesley's message of salvation communicates both threat and promise. The threat lies in the impending wrath of God. The promise lies in the 'free love' and 'undeserved mercy' of God. God, he says, "will have

mercy, not because thou art worthy of it, but because his compassions fail not; not because thou art righteous, but because Jesus Christ hath atoned for thy sins." (1, V, 76)

There is also in his message, as there is in his contemporary, Jonathan Edwards, the basic notion of one's impotence to effect one's own salvation. 'Natural man,' whose basic nature is sinful, is utterly dependent on God. In "The Way to the Kingdom" (Series 1, V, Sermon VII: Mark 1:15), Wesley says:

But art thou able to change thy own heart, from all sin to all holiness? to quicken a soul that is dead in sin,--dead to God, and alive only to the world? No more than thou art able to quicken a dead body, to raise to life him that lieth in the grave. Yea, thou art not able to quicken thy soul in any degree, no more than to give any degree of life to the dead body. Thou canst do nothing . . .; thou are utterly without strength. (1, V, 84)

The implication is that just as only God can raise a body from the dead, only God can raise a soul which is dead in sin. Wesley's use of the language of resurrection is convincing evidence that at the heart of his message of rebirth and new life in Christ is Paul's doctrine of the resurrection of the dead. It also seems clear that his message is indicative of what one might call a dialectic of holiness. God has sentenced 'natural man' to death as a consequence of the sin of the 'first Adam.' All are dead in sin. At the same time, God has also made available the opportunity for redemption by means of the life, death and Resurrection of the 'Second Adam.' One thinks of Deuteronomy 30:19-20 in this context: "I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that I have set before you life and death . . .; therefore choose life, that you . . . may live, loving the Lord your God . . ."

SERMON IX: "THE SPIRIT OF BONDAGE AND ADOPTION" (ROM. 5:15)

In this sermon Wesley seems intent on outlining the progressive stages through which one passes from being dead in sin, through new life in Christ, to perfection. He applies the schema of death, resurrection and consummation to the three stages of conversion in the form of 'natural man,' 'legal man' and 'evangelical man.' Here is his summary of the discussion:

To sum up all: the natural man neither fears nor loves God; one under the law, fears;--one under grace, loves him. The first has no light in the things of God, but walks in utter darkness; the second sees the painful light of hell; the third, the joyous light of heaven. He that sleeps in death, has a false peace; he that is awakened, has not peace at all; he that believes, has true peace;--the peace of God filling and ruling his heart. (1, V, 108)

We may note that this view is reminiscent both of Bernard's threefold path to truth and of Martin Luther's distinction between the 'proper' and 'alien' work of God, which is seen, e.g., in his commentary on Psalm 90. What I want to lift up in the following discussion is what has already been called the dialectic of holiness, which is implied by Wesley's understanding of the wrath and the grace of God. For Wesley, salvation is a 'dipolar' reconciliation of opposites whose antecedent is the Cross-Resurrection as justification-new birth. In addition, there is the eschatological dimension, which is the final consummation as perfection in love.

On one side is the wrath of God. Luther wrote in his commentary on Psalm 90 that death is "the gravest and most horrible punishment of sin."⁵ In other words, the "fact that we die is the result of God's

⁵Martin Luther, Luther's Works (St. Louis: Concordia, 1956), XIII, 76.

indescribable wrath over sin."⁶ This is the alien work of God, or the dispensation under Law, which stresses the tyranny of death and God's wrath. The function of law, according to Luther, is to terrify hardened and unbelieving despisers of God to prepare them to receive the Gospel.

Wesley, too, speaks of the wrath of God in "The Way to the Kingdom":

Thou are guilty of everlasting death. It is the just reward of thy inward and outward wickedness. It is just that the sentence should now take place. Dost thou see, dost thou feel this? Art thou thoroughly convinced that thou deservest God's wrath, and everlasting damnation? Would God do thee no wrong, if he now commanded the earth to open and swallow thee up? if thou were now to go down quick into the pit, into the fire that never shall be quenched? If God hath given thee truly to repent, thou has a deep sense that these things are so; and that it is of his mere mercy thou art not consumed, swept away from the face of the earth. (1, V, 83)

Two things may be said: Jonathan Edwards could not say it better; Martin Luther would have been proud of him.

On the other side, however, is the grace of God. It is clear that for Luther and Wesley one deserves to die. Death is the natural human condition. But God in his infinite mercy saves humanity from death by means of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. This brings us to the proper work of God. If the function of law is to terrify sinners out of their complacency, to raise them from the dead, so to speak, then the function of gospel is to provide a respite that their dead spirit might be revived. In short, the function of the law according to both Luther and Wesley is to convince 'natural man' of the utter hopelessness of his condition so that he might repent and believe in the gospel of peace, which is in Wesley's words 'the peace of God filling and ruling

⁶Ibid., XIII, 78.

his heart.' For Wesley himself the function of law is to awaken the sinner who is fast asleep in sin, that is, to raise the dead. The law teaches the sinner to fear God; it has the quality of judgment and conviction. Natural man is under God's wrath; legal man is under law; but evangelical man, who is under grace, has the spirit of adoption in his heart. It is evangelical man who has the high privilege of calling God 'Father!' Thus Wesley's incessant refrain: "Abba! Father!" Only evangelical man can truly love God. This is the sum and goal of Christian existence, to love God and one's neighbor. Love of God is the consummation of Christian existence.

SERMON X: "THE WITNESS OF THE SPIRIT" (ROM 8:16)

This sermon, which is in two parts, is on epistemology. Its most important question is, how does one know that one walks in the Spirit? Wesley's answer is that one has the witness of the Spirit, which is an immediate consciousness called the conscience. Here again he employs the language of death and resurrection to describe the process in which one moves from sin to salvation, which is understood as a moral assurance "that we do love God and our neighbor, and that we keep his commandments." (1, V, 114)

The conscience is a

consciousness that we are inwardly conformed, by the Spirit of God, to the image of his Son, and that we walk before him in justice, mercy, and truth, doing the things which are pleasing in his sight. (1, V, 115)

It is the 'witness of the spirit' as

an inward impression on the soul, whereby the Spirit of God directly witnesses to my spirit, that I am a child of God; that Jesus Christ

hath loved me, and given himself for me, and that all my sins are blotted out, and I, even I, am reconciled to God. (1, V, 115)

But before that inward assurance as immediate knowledge from God can even be entertained, it is necessary to have experienced the process of conversion. Conversion may be expressed in many ways, but Wesley's favorite form of expression is in terms of the resurrection of the dead. He consistently refers to spiritual rebirth, which, as we have seen, is itself not salvation but an awakening to one's sinful nature, as being raised from the death of sin. Conversion precedes the spirit of adoption:

. . . the Scriptures describe the being born of God, which must precede the witness that we are his children, as a vast and mighty change; a change 'from darkness to light,' as well as 'from the power of Satan unto God;' as a 'passing from death unto life,' a resurrection from the dead. (1, V, 118-119)

Conversion is a threefold process of death, resurrection, and assurance of divine love and the forgiveness of sin. Wesley says:

O cry unto him, that the scales may fall from thine eyes; that thou mayest know thyself as thou art known; that thou mayest receive the sentence of death in thyself; till thou hear the voice that raises the dead, saying, 'Be of good cheer: Thy sins are forgiven; thy faith hath made thee whole.'" (1, V, 121)

As we have noted, this is experiential theology which depends on immediate knowledge of salvation. It is the voice of Christ whose life-giving Word raises the soul from the dead. Such an experience is not open to public scrutiny. Wesley is evidently sensitive to his culture's presuppositions when he says that there is no answer to the question, 'By what criteria, what intrinsic marks, dost thou know the voice of God?' Faith knowledge is an immediate way of knowing; it is utterly different from and indifferent to rational knowledge, i.e., knowledge gained by reason. Faith is, as it were, a certainty in the heart that one has died and been raised from the dead. This new state or altered condition of

being in the world cannot be verified by testing: "Were there any natural medium to prove, or natural method to explain, the things of God to unexperienced men, then the natural man might discern and know the things of the Spirit of God." (1, V, 122) But natural man, who by definition is dead in sin, does not have the quality of spiritual discernment to apprehend those things that can only be perceived by those who possess the spiritual senses. Spiritual discernment, which is a kind of 'sixth sense,' is a gift of God to those who love him and is manifest in the gifts of the Spirit, which are love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, and goodness. That is to say, these qualities are the 'marks' of evangelical man, who truly loves God and neighbor. They are not offered as proof of salvation, but as an indication of God's immediate presence as the Spirit of love.

Wesley's discussion of natural human existence vis a vis evangelical existence reminds one of the gospel of Mark's view of the mystery of the kingdom and why Jesus employed parables. Only the inner circle of disciples is given to understand the secret of the kingdom. Jesus used parables, Mark says, to confound outsiders, that seeing, they might not perceive, and hearing, they might not understand, "lest they should turn again and be forgiven." (4:10-13) The Marcan secret, apparently, is that Jesus is the Messiah of God, and this despite crucifixion, by virtue of the Resurrection. Only those who are privy to this information and believe in Jesus may experience conversion and forgiveness. According to Wesley, conversion is effected by a form of spiritual resurrection which is experienced 'as a vast and mighty change' from death to new life. For both the gospel writer and Wesley this inner knowledge is a gift which the outside

world is not heir to. Knowledge of salvation is a divine gift to those who would repent and conform to the image of the Son of God. It is not verifiable by any natural method of testing, but is an 'immediate consciousness,' an 'inward impression on the soul.' This is Wesley's reply to the demand of the 'Age of Reason' for a sign (cf. Mark 8:11-13). In effect he is saying to his contemporaries, as Jesus said to his own generation: You must not test the Lord your God.

Wesley responds to charges that he is an innovator in religious matters by defending his understanding of Christianity and the task of preaching. This defense is most clearly seen in two sermons, "On Sin in Believers," based on II Cor. 5:15, and "The Circumcision of the Heart," Rom. 2:29. It is historical fact that he was charged with being 'heterodox,' that is, of deviating from the received tradition. Wesley's rejoinder is that he does not preach any new doctrine but the essential duties of Christianity. He believes that the task of the preacher is to awaken the soul to the old, correct teachings of the church. He recognizes, however, that he who recovers the essence of Christianity risks the charge of heterodoxy, even though he "is only preaching . . . 'Jesus and the resurrection,' with the necessary consequences if it,--if Christ be risen, ye ought then to die unto the world, and to live wholly unto God." (1, V, 202)

Here in a nutshell is Wesley's understanding of the task and content of Christian preaching, along with his interpretation of that content. The task of the preacher is to proclaim 'Jesus and the resurrection,' which means that those who hear the message and respond must die to the world and live to God. The Christian life is a dying and rising

with Jesus. Whoever has died to the world and risen with Christ has been accepted by God. This concept is in turn translated into the language of "re-creation." The believer who has died to the world has "a right state of soul, a mind and spirit renewed after the image of Him that created it." (1, V, 203) Death, rebirth, renewal of the soul in the imago dei . . . all these terms point to one outstanding feature of the spiritual life: God is "the sole End, as well as Source, of our being."

The charge of innovation was especially aimed at Wesley's doctrine of perfection a concept which was widely misunderstood in his day.

While perfection was never far from the center of Wesley's preaching, only two sermons bear the title, the fortieth and seventy-sixth. One is entitled "Christian Perfection," and the other "On Perfection."

SERMON XL: "CHRISTIAN PERFECTION" (PHIL. 3:12)

Wesley begins his discourse by discussing what perfection is not. "Christian perfection . . . does not imply an exemption either from ignorance, or mistake, or infirmities, or temptations. Indeed, it is only another term for holiness." (1, VI, 5) Perfection is not a state of existence which can be achieved on earth, but is a process of growth in love under the tutelage of the Holy Spirit. It is a maturing or growth in Christ. No matter what degree of perfection one may attain, there still needs to be growth in God's grace. Having said what it is not, the preacher turns to discuss what perfection is. Here he makes a bold claim, one that is subject to misunderstanding. Perfection means freedom from sin. He says that "Christians are saved in this world from all sin, from all unrighteousness; they they are now in such a sense perfect, as

not to commit sin, and to be freed from evil thoughts and evil tempers." It should be noted in passing, however, that Wesley rejects the notion that "there is no sin in a believer." (See, e.g., "Sin in Believers") By saying that the believer is saved from sin he seems to mean that sin has lost its power to hurt the true believer. Sin may still infect the soul, but it has been rendered powerless by Christ's atoning death and Resurrection. The closest analogy one might develop is Paul's allusion to Hosea in I Cor. 15:15b. The Resurrection has taken away the 'stinger' of death, which is sin. Sin no longer has the power to hurt and to kill. This is surely another way of saying that the sin of Adam has been abrogated. Restoration of the divine image is in process. The soul may one day be perfected in love.

Furthermore, Wesley's view of perfection is clearly in line with Paul's view of life in the Spirit. To wit: "But you are not in the flesh, you are in the Spirit . . . If the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit which dwells in you." (Romans 8:9-11) Paul's notion of holiness is tied to his eschatology, as is Wesley's. For Paul, and Wesley who follows him, perfection is in the future. Yet faith in the Cross and Resurrection effects sanctification as a present realization: even now the true believer who walks in the Spirit is being perfected by the 'Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead.' Sanctification, or being perfected in love, is present in the confession of the church.

The text of "Christian Perfection" is Phillipians 3:12, which says, "Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect; but I press

on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own." The preceding section of the third chapter (verses 1-11), which as a whole is a warning against 'Judaizers,' ends with Paul's rejection of his former zealousness in the law. He counts it all as a waste, in order "that I may gain Christ [and] the righteousness from God that depends on faith . . ." This, of course, is reflective of justification by faith. But even more important, Paul seems to say, "that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that if possible I may attain the resurrection of the dead." (vv. 8c-11) That statement is immediately followed by the text of the sermon, so that we can see that the antecedent of 'this' in verse 12 is 'the resurrection of the dead,' which seems to be equated with perfection.

An understanding of the content of Philippians 4 is necessary if we are to grasp Wesley's view of perfection. It is clear from the context that for Paul perfection ultimately means resurrection of the dead, which he interprets here (cf. 3:21) and in I Cor. 15 as transformation of this mortal body into the glorious body of Christ. This event is clearly in the future. One day soon, Paul is saying, we shall be perfected. At that time these lowly bodies will be changed by Christ himself into the likeness of his glorious body. In the meantime one waits in faith, comforted by the Spirit. Perfection, then, is a goal, a prize, not something which is presently realizable. Bernard recognized this fact. Wesley, however, seems to have reinterpreted Paul in light of the Johannine doctrine of eternal life, which is present here and now. There is no doubt that for the fourth gospel eternal life is available today in the church. Paul

comes closest to this interpretation in Romans 8:9-11, which was quoted above. But in Romans perhaps we see evidence of the beginning of a change of Paul's mind. Be that as it may, Wesley understands perfection in terms of the power of the Resurrection-resurrection which is available now in faith. It is the risen Jesus in the heart which allows one to advance by degree in the process of being perfected in love, namely, "to grow in grace and daily to advance in the knowledge and love of God" (1, VI, 6)

For Wesley the death and Resurrection of Jesus are manifest in the life of the true Christian. Conversion is radical change or transformation of the 'inner man.' It is being crucified in sin ('dead unto sin') and being raised to new life ('alive unto righteousness') in the knowledge of the power of the Resurrection (cf. "Satan's Devices"). In line with the empirical, evangelical theology of the eighteenth century enlightenment type (cf. Jonathan Edwards' marks of religious affections and his discussion of conversion in his narrative of that phenomenon), he consistently uses these criteria of conversion--living out the death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ--to demonstrate the meaning of real faith, namely, one must love. There is no separation of faith and works in Wesley's thought. Justification-sanctification, which is symbolized by the Cross and Resurrection, is a 'dipolar' reality. It is a new form of existence, whose content is love of God and love of neighbor. To be perfect is to be loving.

Two modern interpreters of love fulfilling human existence, John Cobb and Daniel Day Williams, seem to capture the meaning of Wesley's view of perfection in love. Cobb writes:

All Christian images of resurrection and of new life beyond the grave point to something qualitatively new and other. In Jesus himself we

see actualized a possibility in crucial respects quite beyond that which we find realized in ourselves.⁷

Cobb's analysis of love is helpful in interpreting Wesley's understanding of Christian perfection. Cobb defines Christian existence "as spiritual existence that expresses itself in love."⁸ The Christian doctrine of grace, which attempts to express the virtually ineffable love of God for sinful humanity, frees us to love our neighbor as ourselves. In brief: "We love only because we are first loved."⁹ Williams, too, has a helpful thought for our understanding of being perfected in love. He says:

To have faith in Jesus' resurrection is to have faith that the spirit of love incarnate in him has created a new body for its life in the world. The new life is a life of trust in God, and hope for eternal communion with him. It is a new form of human experience which is the beginning of putting on the form of Christ.¹⁰

Wesley would understand both these theologians as expressing his view of Resurrection-resurrection manifesting itself in terms of being perfected by God in Christian love which transforms human existence by means of the new life offered in the church.

To summarize Wesley's view of perfection: faith and ethics, justification and sanctification, conversion and holiness are all marks or signs of the saving efficacy of the Cross/Resurrection as a present reality in the new life of the church. Where there is no love there is

⁷John B. Cobb, Jr., The Structure of Christian Existence (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967), 143.

⁸Ibid., 125.

⁹Ibid., 135.

¹⁰Daniel Day Williams, The Spirit and the Forms of Love (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 169.

no faith and hence no salvation. Without love the world is dead in sin and spiritual sickness. Only faith in the Cross can awaken the conviction of sin and lead one to the goal of love, which is the true evangelical spirit. What is the content of faith? It is a personal assurance of the love of God. Without faith, love of God and neighbor is impossible.

Wesley says:

For without this faith, without an abiding sense that Christ loves me, and gave himself for me, without a continuing conviction that God for Christ's sake is merciful to me a sinner, it is impossible that I should love God: . . . And unless we love God, it is not possible that we should love our neighbor as ourselves . . . ("Satan's Devices," 1, VI, 36)

The life of holiness is possible only insofar as the divine image, which has been distorted and corrupted by sin, is renewed in the image of the Holy One. Indeed, the end of religion is to "renew our hearts in the image of God . . ." (1, VI, 64) And the image of God is love.

SERMON LXXVI: "ON PERFECTION" (HEB. 6:1)

This sermon continues the theme of "Christian Perfection," on holiness as being perfected in the image of God's love. Wesley says:

This is the sum of Christian perfection: It is all comprised in that one word, Love. The first branch of it is the love of God: And as he that loves God loves his brother also, it is inseparably connected with the second: 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself:' Thou shalt love every man as thy own soul, as Christ loved us. 'On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets:' These contain the whole of Christian perfection. (2, VI, 413)

Perfection consists, in short, in being "recreated" in God's image:

Now, the moral image of God consists . . . 'in righteousness and true holiness.' By sin this is totally destroyed. And we can never recover it, till we are 'created anew in Christ Jesus.' And this is perfection. (2, VI, 414)

It should be noted that Wesley makes a distinction between the natural and the moral image of God. The natural image consists in the qualities of self-motion, understanding, will and freedom of choice. The moral image consists 'in righteousness and true holiness.' Both the natural and the moral image were destroyed by original sin. Here he is speaking of the destruction of the moral image. In "The General Deliverance," which will be discussed below, he speaks on the destruction of the natural image. It is clear that for Wesley both the natural and the moral image are partially restored by Christ when one is justified by faith and sanctified by what he calls the 'power of the resurrection.' The power of the resurrection is apparently the Spirit of God who is love itself, which means that it is finally the power of love which is being fulfilled in us. But love is only partially realized on earth. Final fulfillment, or true perfection, must wait until the end of time. Like Bernard before him, Wesley views perfection as both now and not yet.

SERMON XLV: "THE NEW BIRTH" (JOHN 3:7)

In this sermon we see clearly Wesley's view of conversion as a process of being perfected in the love of God, which is expressed in the restoration of the divine image. While the text is from the fourth gospel, the substance of the sermon is Wesley's hermeneutic of what one might call the myth of the 'primal man' in I Corinthians 15. This is how Wesley defines the problem of natural human existence, which is symbolized by Adam, the first man:

Know your disease! Know your cure! Ye were born in sin: Therefore, 'ye must be born again,' born of God. By nature ye are wholly corrupted: By grace ye shall be wholly renewed. In Adam all ye died:

In the second Adam, in Christ, ye all are made alive. 'You that were dead in sins hath he quickened.' Now, 'go forth from faith to faith,' until your sickness be healed; and all that 'mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus! (1, VI, 65)

Wesley goes on to make the observation, which is implied in this quotation, that there are two kinds of death: moral death and natural death. Like Luther before him, he sees that God's warning to Adam, 'If you eat of the fruit, you shall surely die,' was not carried out immediately. Therefore he believes that this cannot mean physical death but spiritual death, since

it is evident, Adam did not die in this sense, 'in the day that he ate thereof.' He lived . . . above nine hundred years after. So that this cannot be understood of the death of the body, without impeaching the veracity of God. It must therefore be understood of spiritual death, the loss of the life and the image of God." (1, VI, 68)

With this understanding in mind, it therefore becomes quite easy for Wesley to reinterpret the myth of the primal man in I Corinthians 15. That in Adam all die may be understood as a spiritual death. The fact that all are made alive in Christ may in like manner be understood as a spiritual awakening, meaning rebirth or even resurrection. Again, this is in line with the historical designation of the mood of Wesley's times as being a 'great awakening.' In fact, the great awakening may be understood as descriptive of a spiritual resurrection of the dead. Indeed, Wesley himself understands it in those terms. He says of the sin of Adam: "The natural consequence of this is, that everyone descended from him comes into the world spiritually dead, dead to God, wholly dead in sin; entirely void of the life of God; void of the image of God . . ." (1, VI, 68) That is why rebirth is necessary. Given the depravity of the human condition--'the entire corruption of our nature'--one must be born again. Humanity must have the image of God renewed in order to experience the new

life. Humanity must experience a spiritual resurrection of the dead through faith in Jesus Christ who rose from the dead in both senses.

The nature of the new birth is conversion or transformation of the soul.

It is that great change which God works in the soul when he brings it into life; when he raises it from the death of sin to the life of righteousness. It is the change wrought in the whole soul by the almighty spirit of God when it is 'created anew in Christ Jesus;' when it is 'renewed after the image of God, in righteousness and true holiness;' when the love of the world is changed into the love of God; pride into humility; passion into meekness; hatred, envy, malice, into a sincere, tender, disinterested love for all mankind. (1, VI, 71)

This kind of language, which is reminiscent of Bernard, is a moving description of the meaning of death and resurrection as conversion of the soul. One in turn is moved to say that of all the sparks which arise from the fire of God's love, few are brighter than John Wesley.

The end of spiritual rebirth is holiness. What is holiness? It is being perfected in love. Wesley says, "Gospel holiness is no less than the whole mind which was in Christ Jesus; it consists of all heavenly affections and tempers mingled together in one." (1, VI, 71) Holiness, then, is the continual love of God. The purpose of religion as holiness is the restoration of the divine image as a unity of divine and human affections. It is to be raised from death in sin into a new life of moral and spiritual excellence, in short, to become like Christ.

Spiritual rebirth is therefore related to sanctification. Spiritual resurrection is but the first step in the process of being made holy or being perfected. Wesley appeals to the analogy of human growth and development:

A child is born of a woman in a moment . . . Afterward he gradually and slowly grows, till he attains to the stature of a man. In like

manner, a child is born of God in a short time, if not in a moment. But it is by slow degrees that he afterward grows up in the measure of the full stature of Christ. The same relation, therefore, which there is between our natural birth and our growth, there is also between our new birth and our sanctification. (1, VI, 76)

Sanctification is being nurtured in the faith:

God having quickened him by his Spirit, he is alive to God through Jesus Christ. He lives a life which the world knoweth not of, . . . God is continually breathing, as it were, upon the soul; and his soul is breathing unto God. Grace is descending into his heart; and prayer and praise ascending to heaven: And by this intercourse between God and man, . . . , as by a kind of spiritual respiration, the life of God in the soul is sustained; and the child of God grows up, till he comes to the 'full measure of the stature of Christ.'
(1, VI, 76)

Wesley's teaching on rebirth and holiness participates in that stream of mystical consciousness which was personified by Bernard of Clairvaux and many others. As a witness to the power of the moral interpretation of the Resurrection-resurrection, Wesley enriches immeasurably our appreciation of the psychological depths of the kerygma of the New Testament. His preaching stands as testimony to the power of the gospel to enable the faithful to transcend the death-bound nature of the human condition.

The reality of evil, which is symbolized by death, raises the problem of defending the goodness and power and holiness of a God who would allow physical and moral evil to exist. In history, the task of defending and vindicating the moral attributes of God in light of pain and suffering and death has fallen on the various theodicies of such thinkers as Augustine, Calvin and Karl Barth (cf. John Hick). The problem may be stated as follows: How can one reconcile belief in a God who is unlimited in goodness and power, while one is living in a world filled with evil? Or, as Wesley puts it, "Why is there pain in the world; seeing God is 'loving to every man, and his mercy is over all his works?'" ("On the Fall

of Man," 2, VI, 215) Wesley's answer is, "Because there is sin: Had there been no sin, there would have been no pain." Humanity, which is represented by Adam, chose evil over good. This moral and spiritual failure, according to Wesley, is the original sin and is the cause of pain and evil of all kinds. Anticipating Heidegger, who once said that as 'soon as man comes to life, he is at once old enough to die,' Wesley says that "from the very hour when we first appear on the stage of life, we are travelling toward death: we are preparing, whether we will or no, to return to the dust from whence we came." (2, VI, 222) God has condemned us to die, and this is God's death sentence: " . . . you are dust, and to dust you shall return." (Genesis 3:19c) In this section we shall examine Wesley's theodicy or his defense of God's holiness. At the center of his vindication of God is the 'power of the resurrection.'

SERMON LIX: "GOD'S LOVE TO FALLEN MAN" (ROM. 5:15)

The fall of Adam was necessary, according to Wesley, in order for God to demonstrate his love and show forth his righteousness. Adam had the choice between good and evil. When he chose evil, the moral image of God was corrupted, and humanity died in sin. God offered his Son to atone for the sin of Adam. By means of the Cross and Resurrection God enabled the moral image to be restored. Restoration of the imago dei is effected by faith in Christ and his Resurrection. Faith effects the righteousness of regeneration and spiritual awakening. Faith justifies, which means that it restores the righteousness of God by restoring the moral image of God. The person of faith is free to live the life of regeneration, which, as we have seen, is a process of being perfected in

the love of God and neighbor. Regeneration is tied to God's holiness which is effected by love. As Wesley is found of repeating: 'we love because God first loved us.' In Wesley's schema of salvation, it is first necessary for one to die to sin, only to be raised from moral death into a new life of perfection, which is fulfillment in divine and holy love. This gives real meaning to the spiritual idea of death and resurrection from the dead. Echoing Romans 6:4, the preacher says, "We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life."

The necessary consequence of the sin of the first man has this good result, that humanity is offered the opportunity of salvation through Jesus Christ. Had Adam not sinned by choosing evil, there

could then have been no such thing as faith in God thus loving the world, giving his Son for us men, and for our salvation . . . There could have been no faith in the Spirit of God, as renewing the image of God in our hearts, as raising from the death of sin unto the life or righteousness. (2, VI, 233)

Furthermore, had Adam not sinned, we "could not have been made conformable to [Christ's] death, nor have known the 'power of his resurrection.'" The 'power of the resurrection,' according to Wesley, is the power of the Holy Spirit who sanctifies by "opening the eyes of our understanding; bringing us out of darkness into his marvelous light; renewing the image of God in our soul, and sealing us unto the day of redemption." (2, VI, 234) This argument from opposites, which compares sin and death with righteousness and Resurrection, assumes that the 'power of the resurrection' and the work of the Holy Spirit are coextensive. For Wesley this means that the 'power of the resurrection' as a sanctifying presence

effects certain benefits: it reveals the Father and the Son, that is, completes the trinitarian circle; it gives one the power of discernment, namely, to understand the difference between good and evil and thereby to make the right choices; it brings one out of the darkness of sin into the light of righteousness; it renews the image of God in the faithful by restoring the original moral harmony which was destroyed by Adam; finally, it assures one's ultimate salvation as glorious transformation ('glorification'). These are the benefits of God's holiness. Love is the natural human response to such beneficence. The life of evangelical (read "resurrection") man is worked out in deeds of love. To paraphrase our preacher, because God first loved us and gave his only Son for us, we respond by loving God and our neighbor as ourselves. 'We love because he first loved us.'

SERMON LX: "THE GENERAL DELIVERANCE" (Rom. 8:19-22)

The preacher again raises the problem of "love almighty, ills unlimited." "If the Creator and Father of every living thing is rich in mercy towards all . . .," he asks, "how comes it to pass, that such a complication of evils oppresses, yea, overwhelms them?" (2, VI, 242) Again, the answer is because of original sin. Something is wrong with creation, both in terms of its moral and natural attributes. Nothing is wrong with God, but something is wrong in the created order. In the preceding sermon, we saw Wesley's view of the corruption of the moral image of God. Here we see his understanding of the corruption of God's natural image.

In what qualities did the natural image of God consist? Since God is a Spirit, and since man was created in God's image, man was therefore once a spirit. Now the qualities of spirit, according to Wesley, are self-motion, understanding, will, and freedom of choice, as we have seen. "In these . . . the natural image of God consisted." (2, VI, 243) As a spirit, man in the garden was like a priest of nature. Through him "flowed all the blessings of God in paradise . . . to the inferior creatures . . ." When, however, natural intercourse with God was abrogated by sin, all of the rest of creation suffered. All of nature and creation was corrupted by original sin. This means that humanity is alienated from the rest of creation, so that the lesser creatures now hate humanity and run from human beings, or try to kill them. We live in a fallen world.¹¹

Wesley's analysis of the basic problem of existence anticipates the Darwinian doctrine of 'nature red of tooth and claw.' By that light, life is ceaseless warfare. Life feeds upon life. Every creature is the survivor of another creature's tragedy. Adam's sin, according to Wesley, not only brought death and suffering upon humanity, but upon all of the rest of creation as well. In a real sense, Wesley is also saying that original sin resulted in the separation of man and nature, an unnatural state which causes anxiety and despair. Because of original sin man finds himself alone and friendless in a hostile universe, killing and being

¹¹Cf. Ernest Becker, The Denial of Death (New York: Free Press, 1973). Becker puts it this way: "What are we to make of a creation in which the routine activity is for organisms to be tearing others apart with teeth of all types . . . [?] Creation is a nightmare spectacular taking place on a planet that has been soaked for hundreds of millions of years in the blood of all its creatures." 282-283.

killed by the rest of creation. Wesley's is a profound analysis of the existential situation by which humankind is bound.

Wesley sees hope in the sermon text, however, that one day all of creation will be restored to its former greatness and glory. Echoing the Apocalypse of John, he says that God will create 'a new heaven and a new earth' and thereby restore God's natural image. Suffering and pain will cease. Wesley has reason to hope for the transformation of the entire cosmos, based on Paul's notion that "creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay." Even the 'lower creatures' will enter Paradise:

as a recompence for what they once suffered, while under the 'bondage of corruption,' when God has 'renewed the face of the earth,' and their corruptible body has put on incorruption, they shall enjoy happiness suited to their state, without alloy, without interruption, and without end. (2, VI, 249-50)

This same theme may be seen in "The New Creation" and in "The Mystery of Iniquity." Here is his conclusion to the latter sermon:

God will arise and maintain his own cause; and the whole creation shall then be delivered both from moral and natural corruption. Sin, and its consequence, pain, shall be no more: holiness and happiness will cover the earth. Then shall all the ends of the world see the salvation of our God; and the whole race of mankind shall know, and love, and serve God, and reign with him for ever and ever. (2, VI, 267)

In fact, according to Wesley, this program of restoration is the whole reason why Christ came. Again, had Adam not sinned there would have been no need for a Saviour. In "The End of Christ's Coming," Wesley explores why the Son of God was necessary in the first place. It was, quite simply, Christ's purpose to set things straight by leading humanity out of darkness into light. Christ does this by restoring the natural image of God, which means that he "both opens and enlightens the eye of our understanding." (2, VI, 274) He also strikes at one's pride and causes one to

humble himself before God and strikes at self-will and destroys one's love of the world. But Christ's work on earth is incomplete. Pain and disease, along with lack of knowledge and understanding, still remain. Death is still the last enemy to be destroyed. Only a final divine act of power will complete the work which Christ began. In the meantime one waits in hope, albeit under the sentence of death: "Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return."

Death at least has the quality of ridding humanity of disease and error and pain. When one dies, Wesley says,

error, pain, and all bodily infirmities cease; All these are destroyed by death. And death itself, the last enemy of man, shall be destroyed at the resurrection. The moment that we hear the voice of the archangel and the trump of God, then shall be fulfilled the saying that is written, 'Death is swallowed up in victory.' 'This corruptible' body 'shall put on incorruption;' 'this mortal' body 'shall put on immortality;' and the Son of God, manifested in the clouds of heaven, shall destroy the last work of the devil. (2, VI, 276)

Wesley's dependence here on I Corinthians 15 demonstrates that the final act of restoration, which is the 'creation of a new heaven and a new earth,' when all of creation will be set free from its bondage of decay, corruption, and even death itself, is nothing less than the resurrection of the dead. He seems to be saying that the very substance of this present world will be transformed. This means that the resurrection has cosmic implications. Not only will the faithful be translated from mortality to immortality and corruption be incorruption, but all of the created order as well. In Wesley's eschatology, the resurrection is an act of cosmic significance which will effect a radical transformation of every living creature. There will then be no more warfare among the species, no more eating and being eaten. Creation will be made perfect in every way. Humankind will be at

home in a perfect world, heaven on earth. By this means Paradise will be regained.

This process of transformation, which was begun by Christ and will one day be completed, is what Wesley envisions when he speaks of sanctification as being made perfect in love. Sanctification has to do with holiness, which is how the Spirit of the living God is renewing the world at every moment. Wesley's doctrine of sanctification gives substance to the meaning of resurrection, which, as a symbol of renewal, will culminate on the last day in the complete and perfect restoration of the divine image which was corrupted by original sin. Christ has set this process of perfection in motion. He is, as Paul intimated, the first fruits of the divine perfection, indeed the Representative of God's holiness. But the final perfection of humanity will come only on the day of resurrection, when death itself will be swallowed up in victory. This is Wesley's vision.

SERMON CXLI: "THE HOLY SPIRIT" (II Cor. 3:17)

Wesley returns to this theme in his final sermon, on the Holy Spirit. We shall consider this sermon before turning at last to his treatment of the resurrection of the dead. "The Holy Spirit" returns implicitly to the problem of sin and suffering and death in a world which was created by a good and powerful and loving God.

The Holy Spirit is the image and likeness of God, according to Wesley's interpretation of Genesis 1 and 2. The Holy Spirit was present in the garden of Eden: "Our first parents did enjoy the presence of the Holy Spirit; for they were created in the image and likeness of God, which was no other than his Spirit." (5, VII, 509) The Spirit is God's agency

of divine-human communication. By his Spirit, God "communicates himself to his creatures, and by that alone they can bear any likeness to him."

(5, VII, 510) The Spirit is also God's life in the creatures, so that, "upon this ground, angels and regenerate men are called his children."

The fall of man, therefore, was accompanied by God's abandonment of creation, that is, a withdrawal of the life of God. When Adam sinned, as it were, he was no longer a son of God, because God withdrew his Spirit and left him a mere animal. This means that the

general character . . . of man's present state is death--a death from God, whereby we no longer enjoy any intercourse with him, or happiness in him; we no longer shine with his glory, or act with his powers.
(5, VII, 511)

One's relationship with God is now no longer that of parent and child, but Lord and servant. When God abandoned humanity to a state of death, humanity came under the dominion of the evil one:

. . . so, being sentenced to death for his transgression, [man] was now delivered unto 'him who has the power of death, that is the devil,' whose hostile and unkindly impressions promote death and sin at once. (5, VII, 512)

The problem of sin, suffering and death, therefore, is given classical expression as the result of original sin and the dominion of the lord of death. But God in his goodness did not leave humankind without hope of salvation. He sent a redeemer into the world.

Wesley characterizes the human condition as a state of death due to original sin. If man was to be saved from eternal death, therefore, a redeemer was absolutely necessary. But what would be the work of a redeemer? If, Wesley says, "God should send him a Redeemer, what must the Redeemer do for him?" It is not enough merely to promulgate a new law or to impute righteousness to his followers, important though these

beneficent activities might be. In addition to these things, the Redeemer must restore humanity to its former glory and original state by restoring the image and likeness of God.

Must not then our Redeemer be . . . one that 'baptizeth with the Holy Ghost,'--the Fountain and Restorer of that to mankind, whereby they are restored to their first estate, and the enjoyment of God? (5, VII, 512)

This was the work of Christ as Spirit (cf. text of sermon, ' . . . the Lord is Spirit . . .'). If the work of Christ as Spirit is to restore the image and likeness of God, then the task of Christ as Redeemer is to re-create Paradise by raising humanity from its fallen state of sin and death and by giving humanity new life, which means to give back the Spirit of God (God's life or image and likeness) which was lost when Adam sinned. The restoration of the lost image of God is initiated by a new birth or a being born of God. This means, according to Wesley, "that as by our first birth we did inherit death, so by this birth we might inherit life." (5, VII, 513) This truth, he says, is what St. Paul teaches us in I Corinthians 15:45 (cf. Gen. 2:7), to wit: "The first man, Adam, was made a living soul, but the second Adam was made a quickening spirit." Wesley cannot be unaware of the context of this quotation. Paul is speaking of the resurrection of the dead (verse 42), of physical and 'psychical' bodies. Wesley is speaking of the restoration of the image and likeness of God, of spiritual rebirth. Christ as a 'quickenning Spirit' is the new Creator, He who gives one new life, which empowers one to transcend the death-bound nature of the human condition. Wesley says:

But the Second Adam is, . . ., 'a quickening Spirit;' by a strength from him as our Creator, we were at first raised above ourselves; by a strength from him as our Redeemer, we shall again live unto God. (5, VII, 513)

In other words, Christ as Creator gives one new life in the present. Christ as Redeemer will give one immortality or eternal life in the future. On this note, Wesley turns to discuss what happens to the soul at death, a process which begins with the separation of the soul from the body and ends with the resurrection.

According to Wesley, salvation is a process in that the career of the soul is characterized as having various 'stages of progress.' First, the divine life is hidden in the secret recesses of the soul until death, which "is properly the separation of the soul from the body." ("What is Man?" 3, VII, 229) Next, the divine life (the Spirit of God) comforts the separated soul but does not raise it above the "intermediate region of Paradise." This idea needs further explanation. In a sermon entitled "Dives and Lazarus," (Sermon CXII; 3, VII) Wesley postulates an 'ante-chamber of heaven,' which is a place where departed souls wait for the resurrection and glorification. This means that there is an intermediate stage between death and resurrection. At that time, the body and soul, which were separated by death, will be reunited and glorified by being transformed into heavenly splendor. Souls do not go straight to heaven, therefore, but to Paradise or 'Abraham's bosom' to await resurrection. This place is the "receptacle of holy souls, from death to the resurrection . . . It is indeed . . . the antechamber of heaven, where the souls of the righteous remain till, after the general judgment, they are received into glory." (3, VII, 246) The third stage comes at the moment of resurrection when the divine life will clothe "the body with heavenly qualities, and the powers of immortality." Finally, the soul will be raised in a new body "to the immediate presence and right hand of the Father." (5, VII, 514)

This process, Wesley says, was perfectly exemplified by Christ the Savior of the world, who was the "union of man with God . . ." This implies that the resurrection as perfection will be the realization of complete communion with God. The spirit of Bernard is in the background of this notion of human exaltation.

Sanctification, as we have said, is the gift of the Spirit of God, according to Wesley, whereby one progresses from death to life in union with God. This means that resurrection as the restoration of the lost image of God is the culmination of a process of salvation which happens in stages, from rebirth in the present to heavenly existence in the fulness of the love of God. Wesley says:

But I think the true notion of the Spirit is, that it is some portion of, as well as preparation for, a life in God, which we are to enjoy hereafter. The gift of the Holy Spirit looks full to the resurrection; for then is the life of God completed in us. (5, VII, 515)

Again, this means that sanctification is a process of being perfected, beginning with awakening and rebirth and culminating in the resurrection of the dead, at which time human perfection is complete (cf. Bernard). At that time "we shall be 'the children of God, by being the children of the resurrection.'" Therefore, the spirit of adoption, by which one is enabled to cry 'Abba! Father!' is the spirit of the resurrection. One may assume that this spirit is none other than the Spirit of the resurrected and exalted Christ, through whom human restoration will be made complete. At the resurrection the image and likeness of God will be perfectly restored through Christ, who is the Spirit of God.

All of Christian striving towards perfection is made possible by what Wesley calls the 'earnest of the Spirit.' This pledge or promise of God's Spirit lives in one now and makes one spiritual. If the life of

God can effect spirituality now, the preacher asks,

how shall it be when, rising again, we shall see God face to face?
when all our members shall break forth into songs of triumph, and
glorify Him who hath raised them from the dead, and granted them
everlasting life? (5, VII, 517)

At that time the grace of the Spirit "shall make us like unto God, and
perfect us through the will of the Father." In the meantime, the preacher
advises us to renounce the things of this world and live a life of self-
denial and suffering, i.e., complete the life of our Savior by purifying
ourselves in anticipation of the consummation.

SERMON CXXXVII: "ON THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD" (I Cor. 15:35)

The editor of The Works of John Wesley has supplied an interesting
piece of information from a notation which appeared in the original edi-
tion of the volume which contains this sermon.

This Sermon was originally written by Benjamin Calamy, D. D., Vicar of
St Lawrence, Jewry, London. It occurs, p. 275, in a volume of Sermons
which bears his name, published in 1704; and is here abridged and re-
vised by Mr. Wesley. (5, VII, 474)

For that reason, and the fact that the theology is rather primitive and
certainly inferior to that of Wesley himself, there is some question as
to whether this sermon should be discussed at all. It is included more
for the sake of historical interest than the light it sheds on the subject.

This sermon sets out to prove that "God can form this dust, so
gathered together, into the same body as it was before." (5, VII, 474)
The preacher uses the familiar Deistic analogy of a watch and the watch-
maker. If a watchmaker can take the various parts of a watch and restore
it to wholeness, he argues, cannot God, the Creator of all things, rebuild
the various parts of the body into the same body, that is, "collect the

ruins of our corrupted bodies, and restore them to their former condition?" (5, VII, 477) With this premise he begins to answer the question which is implied by the text: What kind of bodies shall we have at the resurrection? Four somewhat speculative propositions are offered to describe the resurrection body.

They shall not only be always preserved from death, . . . but the nature of them shall be wholly changed; so that they shall not retain the same seeds of mortality;--they cannot die any more.

Our bodies shall be raised in power . . . This earthly body is slow and heavy in all its motions, listless and soon tired with action. But our heavenly bodies shall be as fire; as active and nimble as our thoughts are.

Our bodies shall be raised in glory.

Our bodies shall be raised spiritual bodies. (5, VII, 481-82)

In sum, the resurrection body will be immortal, powerful, radiant and spiritual. The preacher seems to be saying that at the resurrection, the human body will cease to be a problem, seeing that it is now subject to fatigue, corruption, pain, disease, sin, and death itself. The new heavenly body will be, in comparison, incorruptible, sinless and immortal. This belief, "that a glorified body is infinitely more excellent and desirable than this vile body," has import both for this life and the life to come. The preacher applies the lesson of Scripture to the present situation in this manner:

First, from what has been said, we may learn the best way of preparing ourselves to live in those heavenly bodies; which is, by cleansing ourselves more and more from all earthly affections, and weaning ourselves from this body, and all the pleasures that are peculiar to it. (5, VII, 483)

It will be recognized that this thought is emotionally akin to that of Plato in the dialogue entitled Phaedo, which describes, among other things, his view of death and the after life. "Socrates" argues that true

philosophy may be defined as the study of dying and being dead. Since knowledge can only be gained when the soul is separated from the body, that is, at death, in order to gain knowledge here, the true philosopher must practice dying, which means to practice separating the soul from the body. (Cf. 'weaning ourselves from this body,' above.)

Wesley, according to the sermon, holds that, since there are degrees of splendor in the heavenly world (cf. I Cor. 15:41), those who succeed in weaning themselves from the body will have more glorious heavenly bodies. That is to say, those who practice dying here will be more glorious there: ". . . those who . . . have attained to a higher measure of purity than others, shall shine more bright than others." Plato held that those who gain pure knowledge on earth will not be subject to the transmigration of souls or reincarnation. This means that the soul which was in love with the body (the material world) will be contaminated at death and dragged back into this shadowy, unreal world. Only the 'lover of knowledge' (the philosopher) can enter the communion of the gods (heaven), just as in Christian thought only the true believer can attain eternal life.

The true Christian, therefore, like the true philosopher, need not fear death. According to Plato, since the method of philosophy is to separate the soul from the body in order to achieve pure knowledge, and since that is the definition of death, then why should the philosopher fear what he has attempted to do all his life? Fear of death is therefore unreasonable. The same is true, according to Wesley, of the Christian who weans himself from the body. He reasons that life is but a dream and our bodies but tabernacles or temporary dwellings. When the Christian dies the soul will separate from the body and fly to the 'bosom of Abraham,' which, as

we have seen, is the 'antechamber of heaven' where one waits to be reunited with the body. Death is therefore not to be feared. Death "is now disarmed, and can do us no hurt. It divides us, indeed, from this body awhile; but it is only that we may receive it again more glorious." (5, VII, 485)

Plato concluded that the average soul will be reincarnated, after a brief sojourn in Hades. Wesley concludes that the average Christian soul will be "re-embodied" in a miraculously transformed body, after a brief sojourn in the 'antechamber of heaven.' There is room, however, in Plato's understanding of immortality for the soul of the true philosopher to bypass the intermediate stage and go straight to heaven, whereas other lesser souls must be purified in Hades before making the final step. The rest are condemned to return to the phenomenal realm. Both Wesley and Plato agree, however, that this world is not one's real home, and that one should practice dying daily by weaning one's soul from the body.

Wesley's contribution to the ongoing task of preaching the meaning of the Resurrection-resurrection is two-fold. First, he lifts up the spiritual meaning of the 'power of the resurrection' as being raised from a life of sin into a new life of sinlessness and perfection. By the power of Christ among the faithful, sin and death have lost their grip, and one is free to love God and one's neighbor. The evangelical reality is that one is liberated by God from sin and death and is thereby enabled to love and to serve. At the same time, Wesley offers a vision of the future life when the process of perfection will be complete. The new birth as a spiritual resurrection from the dead is but the first step in the process of being perfected in God's holiness and love. Final perfection as

exaltation of the human body must wait until Christ reunites the soul with a new and glorious body on the day of resurrection.

THE STRUGGLE OF THE SOUL

The value of John Wesley in the historical process of Christian proclamation lies in his unstinting devotion to the task of relating the heart of the gospel to the human condition, which he characterized in part as a life of pain and suffering. While he himself claimed that the only knowledge one needs is contained in the Bible, it is clear that he interpreted the Bible in light of human experience, the tradition of the church, and theological reflection. Like all other biblical scholar/preachers, he shaped the apostolic preaching traditions as he interpreted and proclaimed them.

Furthermore, the 'central theme' in his preaching, which was the 'cross-resurrection event,' makes it clear that Wesley recognized the necessity of some form of ongoing moral and spiritual renewal. According to what one may surmise from his sermons, Wesley understood that by proclaiming 'Jesus and the resurrection' the central task of the Christian faith is the establishment of loving relationships among the faithful in light of God's eternal love. Without question, this emphasis on spiritual renewal and moral perfection (to know what is right and do it), whereby one is becoming like Christ as a process of growth and development in love, may have been his most significant contribution to the history of preaching the establishment of Christian faith and ethics. There was nothing exceedingly novel about this perception, since it is inherent in the doctrine of holiness. But Wesley's expression of it was unique. He recognized, as

clearly as anyone else has, not only the ethical dimension of the meaning of God's love but the psychological dimension as well. His comparison of growth by degree in the life of the spirit of the risen Christ with human growth and development reminds one of Lewis J. Sherrill's discussion of the 'struggle of the soul,' which is concerned with "the dynamic self as it encounters God at the various stages of human life . . ."¹² Wesley, as did Bernard, took seriously the struggle of the soul to transcend the death-bound human condition. He would have understood the meaning of this struggle, especially as it concerns the preaching task of engaging the sufferer in encounter with the judgment (Sherrill's "crisis") and grace of God. The history of preaching hinges on this dialectic of divine holiness.

¹²Lewis Joseph Sherrill, The Struggle of the Soul (New York: Macmillan, 1951), 7.

Chapter 7

F. W. ROBERTSON: SEARCHER AFTER TRUTH

SERMONS ON I CORINTHIANS 15

We begin this chapter with a discussion of Robertson's expository lectures on the Corinthian correspondence, specifically his comments on I Corinthians 15.¹ Robertson divided the chapter into five parts: I. verses 1-12; II. verses 13-20; III. verses 21-34; IV. verses 35-45; and V. verses 46-58. He based his lectures on each of these divisions.

In the first two discourses he speaks on Resurrection proofs, consisting of the argument reductio ad absurdum and Paul's appeal to the account of eyewitnesses as, Robertson says, "historical facts of Christ's resurrection." (XXVII, 204) This issue has been debated thoroughly in the twentieth century by Karl Barth and Rudolph Bultmann. Against Barth,² who believes that verses one through eleven are not intended to be an historical account but a defense against those who claimed that Paul had not preached the original gospel but his own, Bultmann says that he "can understand the text only as an attempt to make the resurrection of Christ credible as an objective historical fact."³ Evidently Robertson is of the same mind.

In the third lecture Robertson asserts that the Resurrection of Christ implies one's own resurrection. Here, of course, he is following

¹These appear as sermons XXVII-XXXI in F. W. Robertson, Sermons on St. Paul's Epistles to the Corinthians (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1864), 201-244. Direct quotations will be identified by lecture and page number.

²Karl Barth, The Resurrection of the Dead (New York: Revell, 1933).

³Rudolph Bultmann, Faith and Understanding (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), 81.

Paul, who himself is arguing that the fact of Resurrection is proof that there is a resurrection of the dead. This argument raises two questions which Robertson attempts to answer. Why does it imply our own resurrection? When will it happen? The answer to the first question is because we have the life-giving spirit of Christ, which is as it were an antidote against death. This point will be seen as an interpretive principle as we examine the sermons proper. The loss and decay of physical existence are overcome by the spiritual dimension of the resurrected Christ in Christian people, culminating in immortality, which is coextensive with resurrection of the dead in Christ. This means in a sense that the idea of Resurrection assures Christian immortality as resurrection. In answer to the second question, Robertson says that resurrection will happen at the 'second coming,' there being an intermediate stage of immortality between death and final perfection ('consummation'). Here Robertson shares the viewpoint of Wesley, whom he may have read. Robertson's teaching on perfection is so similar to Wesley's, namely that perfection ultimately has to wait for the day of resurrection, that there may well be literary and homiletical dependency. We see the same eschatological motif in Bernard, however, so perhaps both Robertson and Wesley are simply reflecting the church's understanding of sanctification as it has been handed down.

Robertson's fourth lecture on the resurrection speaks of 'the credibility of resurrection.' Finally, lecture five has to do with nature and spirit, the principle that the 'natural' precedes the 'spiritual.' This "lesson," incidently, is applied throughout his sermons as a kind of epigenetic principle of growth and development of human character. The life of the human person is characterized as stages of growth from the natural, carnal existence of youth to the spiritual qualities of old age

and maturity. Life is a maturing of character, through stages of spiritual growth, aided by divine sympathy, culminating with death, immortality, and final perfection. In brief, this is the preaching of F. W. Robertson on the meaning of resurrection.

Lecture XXVII (I Cor. 15:1-12)

Robertson begins his analysis of the chapter with this generalization: "The whole of this chapter is occupied with the proof of the doctrine of Resurrection." (XXVII, 202) He rightly understands the occasion for the composition of Paul's defense, namely, the denial of that doctrine in the twelfth verse, but he applies it more to the Resurrection of Christ than the resurrection of the dead. He also says that this is an intellectual error, not a moral wrong-doing. One doubts if Paul would completely agree with that evaluation. From Paul's point-of-view, there is an integral relationship between denial of the Corinthians' faith stance (cf. verse 1) and the breakdown of morality and the breakup of the church (cf. chapters 1 and 5 of I Corinthians). That is, Paul seems to be saying that the problem with the church at Corinth is that it has deviated from the apostolic preaching. Once the kerygma, which is the teaching by virtue of which the Corinthians became a church, is denied, then disintegration and moral decay are assured. As Paul wrote to the Romans, "If you confess in your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." (Romans 10:9) The moral and spiritual life of the church at Corinth is threatened because they have deviated from the historic confession of faith. They are, according to Paul, in danger of losing the saving grace of God by denying

the resurrection of the dead and thereby denying the Resurrection of Christ.

Robertson characterizes Paul's opponents' 'intellectual error' in this manner:

They said, "Just as out of the depths of winter, spring rises into glory, so figuratively speaking, you may say there is a resurrection of the soul when it rises above the flesh and the carnal desires of nature. That is the resurrection; beyond it there is none." (XXVII, 203)

Robertson says that Paul is arguing against that kind of 'ultra-spiritualism' in this chapter. He goes on to explain:

And he does it by a twofold line of argument; first, by historical proofs of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and after that he proves the truth of the resurrection by the demonstration of the absurdity of all opposite views. (XXVII, 204)

The first line of argument, 'by historical proofs of the resurrection of Jesus Christ,' is an appeal to the truth of the future resurrection based on the history of Jesus, that is, "those truths . . . as actually existing in the life of Jesus Christ . . ." (XXVII, 205)

Robertson's argument is based on this principle: "Reverence in persons precedes the belief in truths." Truth, he says, is rarely abstract. It almost invariably comes in human form. To wit: ". . . it is not by our desires or aspirations or intellect, that we reach the truth, but it is by believing first in persons who have held the truth." (XXVII, 206)

This principle, he implies, accounts for Paul's appeal to eyewitnesses of the risen Jesus and for his grounding the doctrine of resurrection in the history of Jesus. The 'spirit of historical Christianity,' Robertson says, means that "we do not believe that there shall be a life to come, merely because there is something within us which craves for it,

but because we have believed in the life, and death, and resurrection of the Man of Nazareth . . ." (XXVII, 207)

Robertson's argument is persuasive, but it fails to take account of one important intermediate step. One cannot go straight from belief in Jesus to belief in the life to come without running into the faith of the apostles. To ignore that is to close one's eyes and leap over their faith. His hermeneutical principle, that 'reverence in persons precedes the belief in truth,' could imply that one accepts the truth of the Resurrection insofar as one respects those who proclaimed that Christ has been raised from the dead. We do not have the history of Jesus so much as the story of Jesus, which was told by those who believed in him. The only history we have is the history of relationship in faith. Robertson, who stands at the dawn of modern historical criticism, fails to see that relationship.

The second line of argument, 'by the demonstration of the absurdity of all opposite views,' is the familiar reductio ad absurdum, from which, Robertson says, Paul draws the following conclusions. First, if there is no resurrection of the dead, which for Robertson is 'resurrection in some form,' then Christ has not been raised. According to our preacher, this means that when Christ commended his Spirit into God's hands (Luke 23:46), "God's reply to that prayer was 'Annihilation!'" If Christ has not been raised, Robertson argues, then he was a total failure. Second, if Christ has not been raised, then Christian preaching is in vain and one's faith is in vain. This implies, says Robertson, "that the Christian faith . . . must have failed in redeeming man from sin." (XXVII, 208) The gospel is therefore "one fatal, tremendous, awful

failure." This in turn leads to the third absurdity, as Robertson interprets Paul, that the apostles would then be liars. He says that "either the resurrection was a fact, or else it followed with the certainty of demonstration that the Apostles were intentional false witnesses before God." (XXVII, 210) This in turn leads Robertson into a brief digression on the veracity of Paul and the other Apostles. Here is his premise:

Truth, so to speak, has a certain ring by which it may be know. Now, this chapter rings with truth; . . . and before you can believe that there is no resurrection of the dead, you must believe that this glorious chapter, . . ., was written by one who was speaking what was false. (XXVII, 210)

Is that necessarily true? Robertson's own argument on moral versus intellectual error, which we discussed above, may be turned on Paul at this point. Paul may indeed be guilty of 'intellectual error,' not moral wrongdoing, such as lying. The Resurrection and its consequent may well not be a fact at all, but merely a sincerely held belief or opinion. No one can be accused of lying when he holds his convictions sincerely, only mistaken. Paul and the other apostles may have sincerely believed in the Resurrection of Christ, but this may mean only that the cause of Jesus goes on in the ongoing life and work of the churches (cf. Marxsen). That fact, that indeed the cause of Jesus goes on, is miracle enough in itself, but it is no guarantee of the historicity of the Resurrection. In like manner, simply because Paul sincerely believed in the surety of the resurrection of the dead at the 'second coming' of Christ is no reason to posit that doctrine as historical certainty. In short, Robertson's argument ignores the fact that one can believe one is speaking the truth and

still be wrong. Sincerity is no guarantor of truth, even that of the apostles. It only assures us that one's conviction is profoundly held.

The fourth conclusion is "that those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished." (XXVII, 211) Robertson points out that Paul does not say that no one who has died has perished, but that those who have died in Christ have perished, if there is no resurrection of the dead. In language reminiscent of Luther he says:

There is nothing which makes annihilation impossible. God, in the superabundance of His power, creates seeds merely to cast them again into annihilation. We do not see why He cannot create souls, and cast them again into nothingness, as easily as He does seeds. (XVII, 211-212)

The point of Paul's argument, according to Robertson, is "that if there be no resurrection of the dead, then 'they who have fallen asleep in Christ' have perished: in other words, the best, the purest, the noblest of the human race." For Robertson this is the absurd conclusion of denial of the resurrection, the 'strange conclusion' "that by believing that which is false, we became pure and noble; and by believing that which is true, we became base and selfish!" It is clear that he believes that Christians are by and large better than the rest of humanity, which is generally of a lower order. How could Christians become better by accepting a lie--the Resurrection--and the rest of humanity worse by denying the lie and thereby paradoxically discovering the truth? That would be absurd. Instead, according to Robertson, the nobility of Christianity and the moral excellence of Christians hinge on the absolute truth of the Resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of the dead.

Lecture XXVIII (I Cor. 15:13-20).

This discourse is essentially a reiteration of the foregoing arguments pertaining to the absurd conclusions which follow denial of the resurrection of the dead.

First, if there is no resurrection, the apostles are liars. For Robertson the argument is simple, namely, that "the resurrection is a fact, or else a falsehood." (XXVIII, 215) If it is a falsehood, then the two most prominent apostles, Peter and Paul, would be seen as false witnesses, which is something Robertson finds incredible. He challenges his audience in this way:

We defy you to read the chapter and believe that Paul was doubtful of the truths he there asserted. There is one of the impossibilities; if there be no resurrection of the dead, then these two glorious apostles were false witnesses. (XXVIII, 216)

Again, there are two problems with arguing from the list of witnesses in the third through the eleventh verses of I Corinthians 15. Robertson assumes that by calling up a host of witnesses, including Peter and James and even himself, Paul intended to "historicize" the Resurrection in order to lend credibility to the resurrection. This may seem self-evident, but it is true in appearance only. In fact, as Schillebeeckx has argued, the list of witnesses is brought in to

give clear expression . . . to the apostolic kerygma as 'the universal faith of the Church.' Paul is not listing witnesses to the resurrection here--a notion foreign to him. He is providing a list of authorities who all proclaim the same thing, namely, that the crucified One is alive; one and the same evidential ground of faith inspires them all.⁴

⁴Edward Schillebeeckx, Jesus: An Experiment in Christology (New York: Seabury Press, 1979), 348.

The second problem is that, as we have seen, Robertson begs the question of sincerely held yet mistaken belief, when compared with truth as historical certainty. One might say that to believe in the Resurrection is to believe in Peter and Paul who proclaimed that Christ allowed himself to be seen by them. If 'reverence in persons precedes the belief in truth,' then one's faith is dependent less on historical certainty and more on accepting the universal faith of the church. No one would state that in I Corinthians 15 Paul 'was doubtful of the truths he there asserted.' It goes without saying that Paul firmly believed both in the Resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of the dead. For Paul these doctrines were historical certainties. But unless one 'reverences' Paul and the other apostles, unless one believes in Paul, what he has to say remains an idle tale. Faith, Luther said, is an acoustical affair. This seems to mean that faith comes by hearing. Trust in the speaker, therefore, is absolutely essential for faith to catch fire in the human heart. Unless one trusts the story teller, the story can never be veritas pro me. It remains in the realm of eternal ideas and is never actualized in one's own concrete experience. Truth must be actualized. Then and only then can it be said that veritas me liberabit.

The second conclusion which follows a denial of the resurrection is that "if there be no resurrection, Christ is not risen." (XVIII, 216) According to Robertson, this means that the destiny of the human race is linked to the destiny of Jesus Christ. This is a hermeneutical principle which guides his understanding of the New Testament in general. To wit: "If Jesus rose, then the Human race shall also rise, but if there be no resurrection for man, then the Apostle, holding to his logic, says, Jesus

Christ, the Son of God, is not risen." But in fact, it could also be said that Jesus was unique and therefore his Resurrection was unique. For Robertson, however, Jesus' uniqueness hinges on the belief that he is Truth Incarnate, namely, the Truth of the human condition. He is a perfect exemplification of all that is noble in the human character. As the Son of Man, the career of Jesus is a model or example of the destiny of other human beings. That is why it is possible for Robertson, and perhaps also for Paul, to say that if there is no resurrection, Christ is not risen. This is a condition of history that is not self-evident.

Robertson continues his comments by observing that the "third absurdity is, that the Christian faith is then unable to free from sin. The ground up which he [Paul] stood was this, that no faith can save from sin without the belief in immortality." (XXVIII, 217) Robertson goes on to say that the promise of immortality cannot be a reward for good behavior, because that would be a form of selfishness. Why, then, does one long for immortality, if not as an eternal reward? "To be with God, to see God, and to understand Him--that is meant by the desire of everlasting life." (XXVIII, 218) If that is true, then the desire for immortality is a form of love, specifically the love of God. One hopes for eternal life in order more fully to love and forever to be with God. That is the way towards human perfection, to become like Christ, the perfect human being, who obeyed God perfectly because he loved God perfectly. Robertson can conclude, therefore, that "the single motive that can be brought forward to liberate a man from selfishness [is] this belief in immortality." This leads one to say that the truth that sets one free,

according to our preacher, is the truth of the resurrection, which is defined as everlasting life with God.

Lecture XXIX (I Cor. 15:21-34).

This sermon continues the discussion of resurrection as immortality by considering the results of Christ's Resurrection and corroborative proofs. The primary result and proof of one's immortality is seen in Paul's statement that 'Christ is the first-fruits of those who sleep.' This means, according to Robertson, that the "resurrection of Christ is a pledge of the resurrection of all who share in His Humanity." (XXIX, 222) From Adam one inherits natural corruption, that is, a body which weakens and dies. From Christ one inherits an immortal spirit. "Therefore," the preacher says, "it is not what we inherit from Adam the man, but in what we hold from Christ the Spirit, that our immortality resides." (XXIX, 224) Robertson sees a spiritual principle of growth in Christ which overcomes the natural tendency of corruption and decay, namely, sanctification as the human spirit being preserved by the Spirit of Christ. He writes, "It is the order of God's providence that the growth of the Christ within us shall be in exact proportion to the decay of the Adam."

It would seem that here Robertson has addressed and partially solved the problem of evil and the God of love. If God is just, and one takes the idea of Christ as a sanctifying Spirit seriously, then natural decay and death are counterbalanced by the growth of Christ within. To draw the analogy of a scale of justice, as one's human nature as a material body sinks toward the earth, the human spirit rises toward heaven. In this way, suffering and death, which are permitted by God, are overcome. The human spirit, which is perfected in the Spirit of Christ, is

empowered to transcend the endless natural cycle of birth, decay, and death. Life is a being towards God as one becomes like Christ. Final perfection--and thus the complete removal of pain and death--is assured by hope in the resurrection of the dead. This fact may be seen in Robertson's belief that the resurrection is "that finished condition when Humanity shall be fulfilled . . ." (XXIX, 225)

A careful reading of this sermon reveals two facts about Robertson's understanding of resurrection. First, immortality, which is the survival of the human consciousness or self, is not the resurrection, although the resurrection is a form of immortality, but in the body. In language which reminds one of Wesley, Robertson envisions an intermediate stage--between physical death and resurrection--in which only the human spirit survives. When Christ comes to raise the dead the spirit will be reunited with the body. Second, resurrection is the perfection of one's humanity, 'that finished condition when Humanity shall be fulfilled . . .' This idea, which is akin to the ancient idea of apotheosis, may mean that one's humanity will then be like Christ's.

Furthermore, not only humanity but all of creation is being transformed by the indwelling Spirit of the risen Christ. Apotheosis is not limited to believers in Christ but includes the whole of creation. Robertson evidently anticipates a transformation of the entire universe. The problem of the fallen state of nature is linked to the fallen state of man, namely that "certain hindrances at present prevent the perfect operation of God in our souls." (XXIX, 225) Something is preventing God from transforming the world and humankind. Death, which is defined as a physical and moral evil, still stands in the way. The resurrection as

final perfection of man and nature will not come to pass until physical and moral evil, whose symbol is death, "are put down forever . . ." When this happens, i.e., when death is destroyed, the resurrection as completion or perfection will come to pass. After evil is put down forever, 'the mediatorial kingdom of Christ' will be superseded by a perfect form of existence in which God is known in a direct and personal way. Of this finished condition the preacher says:

Then God will be known immediately. We shall know Him, when the mediatorial has merged in the immediatorial . . . Then, when the last hindrance, the last enemy, is removed, which prevents the entire entrance of God into the soul, we shall see Him face to face, know Him even as we are known, awake up satisfied in His likeness, and be transformed into the pure recipients of the Divine Glory. That will be the resurrection. (XXIX, 225)

Lecture XXX (I Cor. 15:35-45).

This sermon is on the credibility of the resurrection. Robertson thinks that Paul is concerned with demonstrating the rationality of resurrection, "that is, how, according to right reason, we can believe it possible, and that it is not irrational to believe it." (XXX, 232)

Robertson points out that Paul argues by analogy, which he defines as "probability from a parallel case." He points, for example, to Jesus' teaching the disciples of his death by saying that a seed must be planted and die before it can bear fruit. Jesus, he says,

was reasoning from analogy. For as in nature life comes through death, so also is it in the world of spirit. The Law of Sacrifice, which accounts for the one fact, will also explain the other. (XXX, 231)

Paul, he says, argues in a similar fashion: just as "the life of the seed is continued after apparent death in a higher form, in like manner

the human spirit may be reunited to form . . ." (XXX, 231) As he said of the body in an earlier lecture:

It is the outward form of the body alone which is transitory. Itself shall be renewed--a nobler, more glorious form, fitted for a higher and spiritual existence. (XIII, 95)

Robertson cannot imagine life, even life eternal, without form.

One may note the distinction being made between 'immortality' and 'resurrection,' a distinction which is implied by Robertson's understanding of Paul. The life of the body which is the human spirit will continue out of body after death until it is reunited with a new form. There is here no thought of "death-silence-restoration," which seems to be the real meaning of resurrection of the dead. It is apparently instead the case of "death-immortality-'re-embodiment'." The spirit or soul will be reunited with a new somatic form at the resurrection. The resurrection is, therefore, as it is with Bernard and Wesley, the final act of perfection, with an intermediate stage of immortality of undetermined duration. As we have seen, this is how one resolves the dualistic tension of the body-soul anthropology, our legacy from Plato by way of Greco-Roman theology.

Based on the analogy of the seed that is sown, Robertson sees three natural principles at work in Paul's argument. "First, that life, even in its lowest form, has the power of assimilating to itself atoms." (XXX, 233) In the case of the seed, for example, it undergoes a transformation. The old form is destroyed and yet as the plant grows it assimilates all that it needs to produce a new form. This is crucial for understanding Robertson's view of how the resurrection effects transformation of the old form into a new and glorious body. Speaking of the planted

seed, he says that "that body with which it is raised may be called its own body, and yet it is a new body." (XXX, 233) In other words, the human body will by analogy undergo a similar transformation as the seed which is sown to become a new form. That body with which the soul is raised will be both its own and yet a new body. "The second analogy that St. Paul sees in nature is, the marvelous superabundance of the creative power of God." (XXX, 234) This familiar comparison means that it is virtually incredible--given the wide variety of natural forms--that anyone should question God's ability to create new forms. In reply to the scoffer who would question the doctrine of the resurrection by asking, 'With what kind of body do they come?' (I Cor. 15:35b), Robertson replies, "Look at the creative power of God." He goes on to say that the "third principle which St. Paul refers to, is the principle of progress." (XXX, 234) Like most persons of his century, Robertson accepted uncritically what has been called the doctrine of inevitable progress, which is loosely based on Darwin's theory of evolution. Robertson was preaching at about the same time as Darwin was working out his investigation of the theory that higher forms of life have their origin in lower forms, work which resulted in The Origin of the Species in 1859. This theory lends itself nicely to a natural interpretation of resurrection, since Paul is saying in essence that the lower bodily form will be transformed into a higher form (cf. I Cor. 15:42ff.). As Robertson puts it:

The law of God's universe is progress; and just as it was in creation --first the lower and then the higher--so it is throughout, progressive happiness, progressive knowledge, progressive virtue. (XXX, 234)

This representative sanguine view, that every day in every way things are getting better and better, was destroyed by World War I. This 'principle of progress,' Robertson believes, is seen in Paul's insistence that the 'natural' precedes the 'spiritual.' (verse 46) For Robertson this means "that what our childhood was to our manhood--something imperfect followed by that which is more perfect--so will it be hereafter: our present humanity, with all its majesty, is nothing more than human infancy."
(XXX, 234)

Robertson ends his discourse with an ethical application or use of the discussion pertaining to immortality and resurrection. His first thought is that the idea of immortality and resurrection satisfies the desires of the heart by assuring the faithful that 'death is swallowed up in victory.' This means that the eventual destruction of evil in all its forms is assured. This conviction in turn convinces one of the necessity of preserving the soul from harm and by doing nothing to injure one's neighbor, because acts against one's neighbor have eternal consequences. Here the law of neighbor love in light of eternity is understood to be the motive for righteous living.

Lecture XXXI (I Cor. 15:46-58).

The preacher begins with a summary of his view of the subject: "The fifteenth chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians . . . is filled with arguments, presumptive and direct, which tend to make Immortality credible . . ." (XXXI, 237) Based on the idea of verse 44, 'It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body,' Robertson finds a universal law or principle, "that the natural precedes the spiritual . . ."

(XXXI, 238) According to his interpreter, then, Paul argues like a philosopher in that he "sees no strange isolated facts, but the Truths which are found everywhere in various forms." (XXXI, 238) This opinion may be seen as a variation of Robertson's most important hermeneutical principle, that the Bible, which "is a revelation of the Character of God to us," declares eternal principles or truths. It is the interpreter's task to discover these truths and make them known through preaching.

Continuing his analysis, Robertson proceeds to explore the universality of the law that the natural precedes the spiritual as it is disclosed by nature and history. He makes three points concerning progress as disclosed in the order of creation, the progress of the Jewish nation, and the progress of the human race. Under the rubric of the order of creation, the process of evolution, from lower to higher forms, is again lifted up. Robertson imagines a straight line of development from the formless earth, through plant and animal life, reaching its apex with the creation of human life. The next step in the evolutionary process is immortal life. Concerning the progress of the Jewish nation, he traces the history of the Jews from being a nation of slaves to the attainment of high spirituality. Finally he reaches the most important point, the progress of the human race.

Robertson begins his discussion of human evolution with the Fall. While he recognizes that it created many problems, still the Fall is interpreted in a somewhat positive way. He says:

The Fall . . . was only a necessary consequence of a state of mere nature. It was a step downwards from innocence, but also it was a step onwards--a giant step in human progress. It made goodness possible; for to know the evil, and to conquer it and choose the

good, is far nobler than a state which only consists in our ignorance of both. Until the step of nature has been passed, the step of spirituality cannot be made. (XXXI, 241)

But the Fall was only a step in human progress: " . . . the next step in the progress of the Race was the Birth, and Life, and Death, and risen Glory of Him who was made 'a quickening spirit.'" With the coming of Christ there was the passing away of natural man and the coming into being of spiritual Man. This means that in Christ and the Resurrection, the final step of evolution has already been taken, namely, the rising of the natural into the spiritual. The implication is that through Christ, who rose into the spirit, we too shall be perfected when we become fully spiritual beings, since the destiny of man is linked to the destiny of Christ, who is the perfect representative of the human race.

As Robertson understands it, the perfection of Christ's humanity was already present in Christ's interpretation of the law. Christ transcended natural law and gave us 'Spiritual Instances of the Law,' particularly the Great Commandment. Love of God and neighbor is the spiritual extension of the love which was revealed in Christ. It is no accident that this is true, since the key to understanding the meaning of resurrection may be that it is an act of divine love. Robertson demonstrates keen psychological and theological insight in his analysis of the spiritual law of love. By virtue of the principle that the natural precedes the spiritual, he is able to say that natural affection precedes spiritual affection. This means that love of neighbor precedes love of God. Even though love of God is more important, the fact is that "we begin by loving Man, we do not begin by loving God." (XXXI, 242) If love of neighbor fails to come into being, there can be no higher form possible.

He goes on to say that "out of human love grows love to God." What he seems to be saying is that human love must be cultivated in order that divine love may flourish at its proper time. There is an order to love, first natural then spiritual, just as there is an order to worship (I Corinthians 11) and the coming of Christ (I Corinthians 15:23). Therefore, one must not demand love of God from a child, but cultivate the child's natural affections, so that in time the child will come to love God. Wordsworth's dictum, that 'the child is father of the man,' comes to mind at this point.

Robertson completes his analysis of the natural order of things by saying that the moral precedes the spiritual. This teaching reiterates the idea that one must stumble and fall before he can discover the true meaning of life eternal. That is to say, like Christ himself it is the lot of the human race to pass through sorrow and temptation in order to achieve immortality. Natural man is born of the dust, but in time the Christ comes to dwell in one as a life-giving spirit. This spirit of immortality grows in direct proportion to the decay of one's animal nature. Infinite regress is, as it were, swallowed up by Christ's life-giving spirit. When Adam yielded to temptation, he caused humankind to stumble and fall. Christ, by overcoming temptation and by refusing to sin, "redeemed Humanity into a state of grace." (XXXI, 244) Through Adam humanity fell into sin. Through Christ humanity receives God's gift of grace and the promise of immortality.

THE PREACHING OF F. W. ROBERTSON⁵

We may recall at this point that the extant sermons are in the form of reminiscences, i.e., they were not written out before delivery but were remembered and set down by the preacher after they had been delivered. This means that each sermon lacks the detail of a more fully developed manuscript that has been recorded verbatim by an amanuensis, e.g., or written out by the preacher himself prior to delivery. They are therefore more suggestive of thought than they are richly detailed in thought, a fact that is not at variance with the preacher's understanding of his task, as we shall see immediately below. While there are times when one would have preferred further explication, this lack of detail--both homiletical and theological--is not an unsurmountable barrier to interpretation.

C. B. Robertson, who edited the fifth and final series of the sermons, has this to say about the preaching of his father. His assessment of the sermons, and therefore of the man who produced them, is that they evidence wide tolerance, all-embracing charity, and shed new light upon old truths. Robertson's chief principle of argument, according to his son, was "that of establishing the truth rather than directly combating the error, or, . . ., of disinterring the truth that lies concealed beneath all forms of error . . ." (5, xi)

⁵ Robertson's sermons, which appear in five series, number altogether one hundred and twenty-five. The first four series are in F. W. Robertson, Sermons Preached at Brighton (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1870). The fifth series is in F. W. Robertson, Sermons by the Rev. Frederick W. Robertson (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Treubner, 1905). Each sermon will be identified by series, sermon and page number.

In like manner, Brilioth, a foremost interpreter of preaching, characterizes the pulpit of F. W. Robertson in terms of 'wide vision,' 'ethical seriousness,' and 'rational clarity.' These qualities in Robertson, which seem to indicate an open and inquiring mind, are "deepened into a strong awareness of the dimension of infinity, the awareness of the significance of the trembling intuitions of the life of the spirit."⁶ This would seem to be a recognition of Robertson's concern with eternity, which is a pervasive theme in his preaching. As he said, "Time is short, eternity is long." Brilioth goes on to say that Robertson "is wholesomely textual and often gives a penetrating analysis of biblical personalities and thoughts."⁷ He lauds our preacher for what he calls Robertson's 'psychological sharp-sightedness' and 'his rich and delicately shaded message to the individual.' This panegyric must be tempered somewhat by what is the lack of a wealth of detail in the sermons themselves. In their present form, they are only richly suggestive, which, of course, is in itself a characteristic of good preaching.

Robertson himself, in a letter quoted by his son, had this to say of his teaching, that is, the principles from which his preaching derived its present form.

The principles on which I have taught--Firstly: The establishment of positive truth instead of the negative destruction of error. Secondly: That truth is made up of two opposite propositions, and not found in a via media between the two. Thirdly: That spiritual truth is discerned by the spirit, instead of intellectually in propositions, and therefore that truth should be taught suggestively, not dogmatically. Fourthly: That belief in the human character of Christ's

⁶Yngve Brilioth, A Brief History of Preaching (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965), 181.

⁷Ibid.

humanity must be antecedent to belief in His Divine origin. Fifthly: That Christianity, as its teachers should, works from the inward to the outward, and not vice versa. Sixthly: 'The soul of goodness in things evil.' (5, xixii)

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of this description of the task of preaching is the emphasis on the pastor as teacher. Furthermore, it is clear that Robertson's main aim in preaching was to get at what is real or true. In sum, the pastor as teacher must seek the truth within himself and proclaim it in earnestness and courageousness.

One final word needs to be said before we turn to our analysis and evaluation of the sermons. Certain 'principles' of interpretation are evident in the lectures on I Corinthians 15, which were examined above. First, the risen Christ as a 'life-giving' or 'quickening' Spirit within each believer overcomes the loss and decay which inhere in physical existence. To paraphrase Whitehead's use of Locke: Time as a 'perpetual perishing' is overcome by eternity. The second principle of interpretation is related to the first. Here Robertson appeals to 'historical proofs of the resurrection of Christ,' which is another way of saying that the resurrection of the dead is assured by the Resurrection of Christ. The destiny of those who are living and have died in Christ is related to the career of Jesus as Christ. Third, Robertson's argument that the 'natural' precedes the 'spiritual' invokes the principle of growth and development of human character. To be a Christian is to become like Christ and that is to achieve perfection. 'Natural man,' who is locked up in a condition of sinfulness, is freed by the indwelling Christ to become 'spiritual man.' This view in turn may be related to the final interpretive principle that one sees in our preacher, that of

the doctrine of inevitable progress in life, what one might call the evolutionary view, as life progresses from lower to higher forms. One gathers that there is, according to Robertson, a straight line of development from physical birth through life and death, which is a kind of "new birth," to immortality, which is both formless and finally in bodily form. Again, according to our preacher, there are two stages of immortality: a formless state immediately following the separation of the soul from the body and a final reunification of the soul with a new body at the moment of resurrection. These essential qualities or criteria should be kept in mind as we examine the preaching of F. W. Robertson.

"God's Revelation of Heaven" (I Cor. 2:9-10).

This sermon is based on Robertson's own principle, 'That Christianity . . . works from the inward to the outward . . .,' and on what one might call the Spirit of the risen Christ within each believer. He says: "For every kind of truth a special capacity or preparation is indispensable." (1, I, 23) This means that there are two prerequisites of revelation: first, there has to be a 'Divine Truth,' and, second a 'spirit' which can receive it. In other words, a predisposition or prior belief is necessary in order for one to apprehend the meaning of eternity. Robertson's version of the "hermeneutical circle" is applied in this manner:

If a man go to the eternal world with convictions of Eternity, Resurrection [of the dead], God, already in his spirit, he will find abundant corroborations of that which he already believes. But if God's existence be not thrilling every fiber of his heart, if the Immortal be not already in him as the proof of the Resurrection [of the dead], if the law of Duty be not stamped upon his soul as Eternal Truth . . .

then no scientific analysis or human speech will reveal these spiritual realities. (1, I, 26-28) Instead, "Revelation is made by a Spirit to a spirit . . ." (1, I, 29) This means that divine knowledge or revelation is direct and immediate. Christ within the heart is a token of immortality.

The preacher goes on to say that in order for the Bible to be read correctly and for the real world (the world of the spirit) to be properly understood, it is first necessary to love God. "Love is the condition without which revelation does not take place." (1, I, 31) The form which love takes is obedience, which is to say that love of God is manifested in obedience to God. Once these two conditions are fulfilled, meaning love and obedience, then revelation is possible. Robertson applies the principle of law of love and obedience in this way: "Love God and He will dwell with you. Obey God, and He will reveal the truths of His deepest teaching to your soul." (1, I, 32) One would have to quote in full his concluding paragraphs to get the full sense of this application, but in essence Robertson is saying that this is why Paul preached the Cross of Christ, which symbolizes humility, love, and self-surrender. It was to reveal what Robertson calls the deepest truths of Christianity, the reality of Eternity and certainty of resurrection. The aim of life, aided by the Christ who dwells within, is to live in trust by complete obedience and perfect love of God. He says:

And if obedience were entire and love were perfect, then would the revelation of the Spirit to the soul of man be perfect too. There would be trust expelling care, and enabling a man to repose; there would be a love which would cast out fear; there would be a sympathy with the mighty All of God. Selfishness would pass, isolation would be felt no longer; the tide of the universal and eternal Life would come with mighty pulsations throbbing through the soul. To such a

man it would not matter where he was, nor what: to live or die would be alike. If he lived, he would live unto the Lord; if he died, he would die to the Lord. (1, I, 32)

In other words, complete obedience and perfect love would bring heaven on earth, which probably has to wait for another day.

"Christian Progress by Oblivion of the Past" (Phil. 3:13-14).

This sermon, which is a variation of criteria three and four (see above, 244), is on the imitation of Christ and perfection as the goal of Christian behavior. Robertson begins this discourse by giving a rationale for taking Christ as one's example. His argument has both a negative and a positive quality.

It is not the Redeemer's sinlessness, nor His unconquerable fidelity to duty, nor His superhuman nobleness, that win our desire to imitate. Rather His tears at the grave of friendship, His shrinking from the sharpness of death, and the feeling of human doubt which swept across His soul like a desolation. These make Him one of us, and therefore our example. (I, IV, 59)

Christ's humanity, then, is that which inspires imitation. Here is evidence of another of Robertson's own teaching principles, 'That belief in the human character of Christ's humanity must be antecedent to belief in His Divine origin.'

Robertson goes on to say that by imitating Christ one becomes like Christ through degrees of progress in the Spirit. To become like Christ is to become perfect.⁸ Perfection, which is the realization of complete obedience and love, is the goal and motive of Christian behavior. It serves as a lure to fulfillment and allows the Christian to make progress in life. Perfection, which is a spiritual adoption by God whereby one

⁸ See also "The Christian Aim and Motive" (3, XII; Matthew 5:48)

becomes a child of God, is "the attainment of all conceivable excellence." (1, IV, 60) Perfection is a goal, a lure; it is not completely attainable in this present life. Referring to the text, he says that like Paul, even though one has not attained perfection, one must press on toward the goal, which is for Robertson the achievement of divine character. This means that "in a Christian life, every moment and every act is an opportunity for doing the one thing, of becoming Christ-like." (1, IV, 61) The goal of the Christian life, then, is perfection of character. One does not strive to become like Christ for the sake of reward in heaven, however, for this attitude is indicative of man's sinful condition, which Robertson equates with selfishness. Instead, "God for His own sake . . . this is the Christian's aim." (1, IV, 62) The Christian life is therefore oriented toward the future. When one strives to become like Christ by pressing toward the goal of perfection, one experiences freedom from the past, namely by obliteration of mistakes and the guilt they cause.

Life, like war, is a series of mistakes, and he is not the best Christian nor the best general who makes the fewest false steps. Poor mediocrity may secure that; but he is the best who wins the most splendid victories by the retrieval of mistakes. Forget mistakes: organize victory out of mistakes. (1, IV, 66)

In summary, Robertson says that Christian progress

is the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. What the world calls virtue is a name and a dream without Christ. The foundation of all human excellence must be laid deep in the blood of the Redeemer's Cross, and in the power of His resurrection. First let a man know that all his past is wrong and sinful; then let him fix his eye on the love of God in Christ loving him--even him, the guilty one. (1, IV, 68)

What the preacher seems to be saying is that on the Cross one's past is crucified and in the power of the Resurrection one's future is assured.

The Cross is the past obliterated. The Resurrection is the power of God's love which opens up the future. The meaning of the reality of the Cross and Resurrection, then, is "the knowledge that all that is gone by is gone, and that a fresh, clear future is open. (1, IV, 68) This theme may also be seen in "The Pharisees and Sadducees at John's Baptism." In that sermon Robertson says that the promise of the gospel is really the promise of a fresh start. In Christ "the past becomes as nothing, and life begins afresh. Christ is the river of forgetfulness in which bygone guilt is overwhelmed." (1, VIII, 103)

"The Israelite's Grave in a Foreign Land" (Gen. 50:24-26).

One cannot begin to capture in a brief discussion the richness of this powerful sermon on the death and embalming of Joseph in Egypt. It is one of the most complete statements of Robertson on death and immortality which we possess. Rather than giving a complete description of the sermon, which should be read in its entirety, let us instead lift up three considerations which seem to relate to the foregoing discussion. These are first, the meaning of life, second, the relation of matter and spirit, and finally, the proof of immortality. The first matter has to do with the notion that it is humanity's lot to suffer as Christ did in order to achieve immortality. It is one of the interpretive criteria which were laid down above. The second point has to do with the idea of immortality in bodily form, i.e., the resurrection of the dead. The third consideration is a variation of the rubric that the indwelling spirit of the risen Christ is a pledge of immortality.

The meaning of life, according to Robertson, is that man is born to sorrow.⁹ Two isolated but somehow related quotations will serve to illustrate this point.

The truest account of this mysterious existence seems to be that it is intended for the development of the soul's life, for which sorrow is indispensable . . . It is the law of our humanity, as that of Christ, that we must be perfected through suffering. And he who has not discerned the divine sacredness of sorrow, and the profound meaning which is concealed in pain, has yet to learn what life is. The Cross, manifested as the necessity of the highest life, alone interprets it. (1, XXII, 238)

Calumny, injustice, ungratitude--the only harm these can do us is making us bitter, or rancorous, or gloomy: by shutting up our hearts or souring our affections. We rob them of their power if they only leave us more sweet and forgiving than before. And this is the only true victory. We win by love. Love transmutes all curses and forces them to rain down in blessings. (1, XXII, 241)

Here we have it, perfection through suffering and victory through love.

This is the meaning of life when viewed from the aspect of death and triumph over death. It is, in short, the meaning of the Cross and Resurrection. This point is made abundantly clear by a sermon called "John's Rebuke of Herod," which is on human doubt and failure. John's question about Jesus' messiahship reveals, according to Robertson, a kind of self-doubt which is manifested as doubt of the truth of John's own proclamation concerning Jesus. In the conclusion the preacher makes this point concerning John's feeling of failure, that

we get from this subject the doctrine of a resurrection. John's life was hardness, his end was agony. That is frequently Christian life. Therefore, says the apostle, if there be no resurrection the Christian's choice is wrong; 'If in this life only we have hope in Christ, then are we of all men most miserable.' Christian life is not visible success--very often it is the apparent opposite of success. It is the

⁹ See also "The Human Race Typified by the Man of Sorrows" (5, I; based on Isaiah 53:3) and "Degrees of Glory" (5, II; on 'perfection through suffering')

resurrection of Christ working itself out in us; but it is very often the cross of Christ imprinting itself on us very sharply . . . Christian, this is not your rest. Be content to feel that this world is not your home. Homeless upon earth, try more and more to make your home in heaven, above with Christ. (3, XXI, 626)

This argument may sound a little too 'heavenly minded' for our modern taste, but the point is that this world cannot be trusted, so one must put his trust where it really counts, in Christ. Only Christ gives life meaning.

The subject of apparent failure, which we met in the sermon on John, is touched on again in "Elijah."

If ever failure seemed to rest on a noble life, it was when the Son of Man, deserted by His friends, heard the cry which proclaimed that the Pharisees had successfully drawn the net round the Divine victim. Yet from that very hour of defeat and death there went forth the world's light--from that very moment of apparent failure there proceeded forth into the ages the spirit of the conquering Cross. Surely if the Cross says anything, it says that apparent defeat is real victory, and that there is a heaven for those who have nobly and truly failed on earth. (2, V, 292)

Again, the meaning of human life is characterized by Robertson in terms of apparent failure and victory in defeat. Humankind is born to sorrow, meets apparent failure on every front, and prevails by overcoming defeat and emerging victorious. The symbolism once more is Cross and Resurrection.

We turn now to the second point of the discussion, on immortality in bodily form. This argument has to do with the relation of matter and spirit and takes the form of an analysis of the distinction between the philosophies of materialism and spiritualism. At this point Robertson becomes something of an apologist when he says that Christianity

grants all that the materialist, and all that the spiritualist, have a right to ask. It grants to the materialist, by the doctrine of the resurrection of the body, that future life shall be associated with a material form . . . It simply pronounces that the spirit shall have a body. It grants to the spiritualist . . . that the spirit

shall be free from evil. For it is a mistake of ultra-spiritualism, to connect degradation with the thought of a risen body; or to suppose that a mind, unbound by limitations of space, is a more spiritual idea of resurrection than the other. (1, XXII, 243-44)

Robertson goes on to argue that there is no inherent evil in matter since "this world itself [is] but the form of Deity, whereby the manifoldness of His mind and beauty manifest, and wherein it clothes itself." (1, XXII, 244) This idea is reminiscent of process philosophy a la Samuel Alexander (1859-1938), a British philosopher who held that space-time is the ultimate principle of all existence. It may prove interesting to compare Alexander with Robertson. Alexander wrote:

For Time has been described as the soul of Space-Time, with Space for its body. And deity also performs to God's body the office of soul and God's body is the whole world.¹⁰

Robertson's 'form of deity' and Alexander's 'God's body' serve the same function, in that they attribute to matter a spiritual essence which is the mind and soul of God ('deity'). In Christian thought this idea, which appears to be neoplatonic, may be seen as an expression of the notion that in Jesus God took human form (see, e.g., Philippians 2:8). In any event, it is clear that for Robertson, as for orthodoxy in general, the soul will one day be reunited with a new bodily form.

In order to demonstrate that the meaning of the resurrection of the dead is not restricted to life after death, hear his words on the work of Christ, which was to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10), in "Christ's Estimate of Sin."

They saw Him at work among the fragments and mouldering wreck of our humanity, and sneered. But he took the dry bones such as

¹⁰ Samuel Alexander, Space, Time and Deity (London: Macmillan, 1920), II, 341.

Ezekiel saw in vision, which no man thought could live, and He breathed into them the breath of life. He took the scattered fragments of our ruined nature, interpreted their meaning, showed the original intent of those powers, which were now destructive only, drew out from publicans and sinners yearnings which were incomprehensible, and feelings which were misunderstood, vindicated the beauty of the original intention, showed the Divine Order below the chaos, exhibited to the world once more a human soul in the form in which God had made it, saying to the dry bones 'Live!' (2, XV, 369)

We have been speaking of the meaning of life and immortality in bodily form. We turn now to the final consideration which is implied by the sermon under discussion, the proof of immortality, which lifts up the risen Christ in the soul of the believer as a token of immortality. It is typical of Robertson that first he defines what the subject is not before saying what it is. This may be indicative of the principle, 'That truth is made up of two opposite propositions . . .'

Not the analogies of nature--the resurrection of nature from a winter grave--or the emancipation of a butterfly. Not even the testimony to the fact of risen dead . . . No; the life of the spirit is the evidence. Heaven begun is the living proof that makes the heaven to come credible. 'Christ in you is the hope of glory.' It is the eagle eye of faith which penetrates the grave, and sees into the tranquil things of death. He alone can believe in immortality who feels the resurrection in him already. (1, XXII, 245)

This latter point reminds us of the principle which we encounter in a sermon called "The Doubt of Thomas," that "there is an inward state of heart which makes truth credible the moment it is stated." (2, XX, 424) When this principle is applied to the resurrection as Christ within, the following statement becomes possible.

There are men in whom the resurrection begun makes the resurrection credible. In them the Spirit of the risen Saviour works already; and they have mounted with Him from the grave. They have risen out of the darkness of doubt, and are expatiating in the brightness and the sunshine of a day in which God is ever light. Their step is as free as if the clay of the sepulchre had been shaken off: and their hearts are lighter than those of other men; and there is in them an

unearthly triumph which they are unable to express. They have risen above the narrowness of life, and all that is petty, and ungenerous and mean. They have risen above fear--they have risen above self. (2, XX, 425)

One who has the Resurrection within the soul "knows as clearly as if he had demonstration, that it must be developed in an eternal life." That is to say, the risen Christ within "is the sole pledge of eternal being in the spirit-life."

A brief summary is in order at this point in the discussion. We have been speaking among other things of Robertson's view of the meaning of life as suffering and sorrow, along with apparent failure--what he calls a mere 'feeling of failure'--and victory in defeat. The symbolism employed by the preacher is suggestive of the meaning of the Cross and Resurrection. That is to say, the Cross represents apparent failure, which is what one might call an illusory or "worldly" perception. The Resurrection represents the true reality, which is the world of the spirit behind or within appearance. This world is not what it seems to be, Robertson suggests. There is more here than meets the human eye. Only the 'eagle eye of faith' can penetrate the appearance to see the reality. What the preacher seems to be saying is that behind this transitory world is a world of permanence. (See, e.g., "Worldliness," 2, XII, and "The Illusiveness of Life," 3, VI.) This visible world is passing away and fading into nothingness. This may be understood as a notion of Greek metaphysics a la Kant, e.g., who divided that which is knowable into phenomena and noumena. Only the realm of noumena is really real; the rest is but passing form. As Robertson puts it:

This world is not yours; thank God it is not. It is dropping away from you like worn-out autumn leaves, but beneath it, hidden in it,

there is another world lying as the flower lies in the bud. That is your world, which must burst forth at last into eternal luxuriance. (2, XII, 342)

"Victory Over Death" (I Cor. 15:56-57).

This discourse, which is the only sermon based on I Corinthians 15, continues the theme of victory in defeat as symbolized by death. The message is that faith gives victory over death. Faith

is that elevation of character which we get from looking steadily and forever forward till eternity becomes a real home to us, that enables us to look down upon the last struggle, and the funeral, and the grave, not as the great end of all, but only as something that stands between us and the end. We are conquerors of death when we are able to look beyond it. (3, XVII, 582)

Faith, then, is that quality which allows one to penetrate appearance to see the reality, that one only appears to die.

Victory over death, according to the preacher, consists in victory over doubt of immortality and the life to come, victory over the fear of death, and, finally in the resurrection of the dead. These are based on the preaching of Paul, that since Christ has been raised from the dead, so also will Christians be raised.

Christ gives one victory over doubt concerning the doctrine of a life to come in two ways:

. . . first, He does it by His own resurrection. We have got a fact there that all the metaphysics about impossibility cannot rob us of. In moments of perplexity we look back to this. The grave has once . . . given up its dead. It is a world-fact. It tells us what the Bible means by our resurrection--not a spiritual rising into new holiness merely--that, but also something more. It means that in our proper identity we shall live again. Make that thought real, and God has given you, so far, victory over the grave through Christ.

There is another way in which we get the victory over doubt, and that is by living in Christ . . . Doubts can be dispelled by that kind of active life that realizes Christ . . . Live above this world,

brethren, and then the powers of the world to come are so upon you that there is no room for doubt. (3, XVII, 583 and 584)

In addressing the second point, that victory over death consists in victory over the fear of death, Robertson rejects the image of 'rapture,' which is a sense of eagerness in the face of death. "Rapture is a rare thing," he says, "except in books and scenes." Instead, victory over death may be seen in those who face it with an inward calm. He writes:

Every day His servants are dying modestly and peacefully--not a word of victory on their lips; but Christ's deep triumph in their hearts . . . They die, and the world hears nothing of them; and yet theirs was the completest victory. They came to the battle-field, the field to which they had been looking forward all their lives, and the enemy was not to be found. There was no foe to fight with. (3, XVII, 548)

Again, death is illusion.

Concerning the third point, Robertson says:

The last form in which a Christian gets the victory over death is by means of his own resurrection. It seems to have been this which was chiefly alluded to by the apostle here; for he says, "When this corruptible shall have put on incorruption . . . then shall come to pass the saying which is written, 'Death is swallowed up in victory.'" And to say the truth, brethren, it is a rhetorical expression rather than a sober truth when we call any thing, except the resurrection, victory over death. We may conquer doubt and fear when we are dying, but that is not conquering death And when you see flesh melting away, and mental power becoming infantine in its feebleness, and lips scarcely able to articulate, is there left one moment a doubt upon the mind as to who is the conqueror, in spite of all the unshaken fortitude there may be? The victory is on the side of death, not on the side of the dying. (3, XVII, 585-86)

Only the 'thought of resurrection' belies the apparent victory of death, because resurrection alone allows one to enter into the full feeling of triumph contained in the text, 'Death is swallowed up in victory!'

Robertson brings the message home to his congregation in all its existential fullness. The 'thought of resurrection' and belief in the Resurrection of Christ mean that Christians are enabled to live triumphantly

in this world under the banner of divine love. He says that "if we would be conquerors we must realize God's love in Christ." (3, XVII, 386) Love is the quality which gives life its possibility by overcoming sin which is symbolized by 'self.' To overcome death by learning how to love is to overcome oneself. "Believe that God loves you. He gave a triumphant demonstration of it in the cross. Never shall we conquer self till we have learned how to love." Life in Christian love is victory. It is

mastery over self, and sin, and doubt, and fear: till the last coldness coming across the brow tells us that all is over and our warfare accomplished--that we are safe, the everlasting arms beneath us--that is our calling. . . . You are to conquer, and the banner under which we are to win is not fear, but love. (3, XVII, 386-87)

We are reminded that the idea of conquering love is rooted in the notion of resurrection as personal immortality which assures one that death does not have the final word.

Even so, Robertson recognizes that death is a real problem. In "Views of Death" he says

One thing is certain. God say, "Time is short, eternity is long." The solemn tolling of the bell seems to cry, 'There is something to be done; there is much to be done; do it!' (4, VII, 671)

He recognizes with John Donne that the funeral bell "tolls for thee."

Yet, immortality gives life meaning in the face of death which threatens meaning. Reflecting again on Paul's thought in I Corinthians 15:19, the preacher says, "Asked from this world's stand-point, if there is no life beyond the grave, if there is no immortality . . . then the mighty work of God is all to end in nothingness . . ." (4, VII, 672) He finds it inconceivable that there is hope in this life only, because this life "is only a state of infancy, only the education for eternity, in which the soul is to gain its wisdom and experience for higher work . . ." He

appeals to the Resurrection as an outward manifestation of the power of God so that one may believe in immortality in the invisible world beyond the grave. The Resurrection is a visible sign of the invisible world beyond the appearance of death. It is, to coin a phrase, a divine sacrament of meaning. For Robertson, the Resurrection is a covenant of love which signifies the assurance of God's gift of immortality. The promise of immortality, as we discover in "Soloman's Restoration," is predicted on the everlasting and indefatigable love of God.

There is such a thing as love which rebellion cannot weary, which ingratitude cannot cool. It is the love of God to those whom He has redeemed in Christ. . . . Oh! trembling believer in Christ, are you looking into the dark future and fearing, not knowing what God will be to you at the last? Remember, Christ 'having loved His own who are in the world loved them to the end.' Your salvation is in the hands of Christ; the everlasting arms beneath you. The rock on which your salvation is built is love, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against you. (4, XVI, 745)

"The Christian's Hope and Destiny Hereafter" (I John 3:2-3).

We come now to the last discourse to be discussed. This sermon, which is on what one might call "intimations of immortality," is divided into two branches, consisting of the "mystery of future existence" and "certainty in future existence."

The 'mystery of future existence' arises from three causes, according to our preacher. It will be a state or condition without bodies, and a state with what is called a spiritual body. The problem is that one cannot imagine formless existence, nor, he says, "conceive how earthly bodies will develop into spiritual bodies." (5, IV, 44) This is the first cause for the 'mystery of future existence.' This point reminds us again that for Robertson, as for Bernard and Wesley, there are

two conditions of eternal life, which consists of a state of the soul outside the body, followed by a time when the soul will be reunited with a new 'spiritual body' on the day of resurrection. This view, which is a platonic interpretation of Paul, is made clear in "The Three Crosses on Calvary." In that sermon Robertson is reflecting on the meaning of Jesus' words to the penitent thief, that "This day thou shalt be with me in Paradise." Because the text implies that the thief will go to heaven on the same day, which would seem furthermore to imply a soul or spirit which survives death, and because the New Testament very clearly teaches the future resurrection of the dead, then there must be an intermediate state of existence between death and resurrection. His conclusion, which seems to reject the idea of death as a dreamless sleep, is "that the intermediate state is not a state of unconsciousness." (5, XVII, 161) This view is based on the fact that the New Testament, by virtue of the story of Dives and Lazarus, Paul's longing to be immediately with Christ, and the story of the penitent thief, "speaks distinctly of a state of consciousness . . ."

The second cause for the 'mystery of future existence' is that it is inconceivable what one's feelings will be in the life to come. Robertson says that union with God so close as to dissolve all other unions would be simply unimaginable. Here he would seem to be reflecting on a theme that we saw in Bernard, that the intermediate state is the soul's union with God to the practical obliteration of self. Hence, it is difficult to imagine how such a state of existence might feel.

Finally, the place of that intermediate state is inconceivable. Robertson suggests that heaven or Paradise must be a state of eternal

happiness, not a place. Even so, such a condition would be as inconceivable to the human mind as is post-natal life to an unborn baby. He asks his congregation to "consider the infant unborn. Its future state is inconceivable. Even light, the life and expounder of all things, is unknown. Now this life is the state of human babyhood. Life here is infancy." (5, IV, 45) The implication of this analogy is clear. By comparing this life to fetal existence the preacher is saying that simply because one cannot conceive of life after death does not mean that it does not exist. There is a world beyond death as surely as there is a world after birth, albeit in a form unimaginable. Robertson's metaphor reminds one of the ancient practice of referring to the day of a martyr's death as his or her birthday.

Robertson bases his 'certainty in future existence' on the text, that "we know that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." In this text, the preacher says, "St. John gives two characteristics of our future destiny: resemblance to God . . . and a clearer vision of Him . . ." (5, IV, 46) To be like God is to love God and experience the peace of Christ. Having become like God, one is then able to see God. That is, seeing God is contingent on becoming like God. Only then is it possible to see God as wisdom, goodness, truth and love. Here is Robertson's interpretation of the text: "No man can see God as He really is unless he resemble Him in character." That is why spiritual preparation as the perfection of Christian character is so important in this world. One will see in the after life what one is spiritually prepared to see, according to the preacher. For, as he says in another sermon, "Each man is his own hell, and his own

heaven." (5, X, 100) Or as he says here, "To see God you must first be like Him. You see Him, feel Him, believe in His existence, just in proportion as you resemble Him in goodness. You have the witness in yourself." (5, IV, 50)

TRUTH AND THE POWER OF SUGGESTION

Like Wesley before him, Robertson too had much to say on the spiritual growth of human beings. We have seen that he preached the Resurrection as a maturing of character, through stages of spiritual growth, aided by the risen Christ as an indwelling spirit of divine sympathy, and culminating in death, immortality, and the resurrection of the dead as final perfection in love. His insistence on the development of Christian character is indicative of the fact that he also saw the relationship of faith and ethics. His preaching, therefore, demonstrated ethical seriousness, wide vision, and deep psychological insight.

But Robertson's fundamental and most significant contribution to preaching lies in his own teaching principles, especially that of the 'establishment of positive truth,' and 'that truth should be taught suggestively, not dogmatically.' It would seem that here he has captured the essence of "Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind," to echo P. T. Forsyth, and that is Robertson's passion for reality. Like Forsyth, for Robertson the Resurrection of Christ was real, since it inspired faith in Jesus' disciples.¹¹

¹¹See "Christianity is a Gospel of Christ's Resurrection" in P. T. Forsyth, Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1907; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), 174-175.

It is the reality of faith as trust in God and not in the world which was the truth that Robertson saw in the apostolic testimony to the presence of the risen Lord in and among the believers. It is the task of preaching to testify to the truth of the Christian gospel by suggesting that Christ is ever present in faith and hope and love. The aim of contemporary preaching must be to get at what is real or true. If, as Phillips Brooks suggested, preaching is truth communicated through human personality (i.e., "incarnational"), and if truth is not variable but constant, then the content of preaching is always the reality of God who is ever present and ever near in steadfast love and faithfulness. By that light God is really, as Whitehead suggested, "the great companion--the fellow-sufferer who understands." (PR, 413) Robertson himself said in a sermon on the divine love and sympathy, that the prophet Samuel "had a conviction that God was a fellow-sufferer."¹² This striking linguistic similarity to Whitehead leads one to say that there is something in the Judeo-Christian view of reality, in combination with certain philosophical assumptions, that promotes the idea of a God who feels and is moved, a God who is persuasive rather than coercive. This notion is perhaps inherent in the various incarnational theories of Christ's divinity. In addition, one is moved to say that Robertson was perhaps a process preacher before his time. He implied throughout his sermons that God as a 'fellow-sufferer' does not stand outside the world as a philosophical abstraction, e.g., Aristotle's "unmoved mover," but is identified with the struggle of the human spirit to seek

¹²"Appointment of the First King of Israel" (4, II, 639).

what is good and true and resist what is evil and false. As Mellert has written, according to process theology

God is not a last resort who stands outside the system and remains independent of it. Rather, God is an integral element in the whole world and participates actively in its struggles and concerns.¹³

Concerning our preacher, all of this may be summarized by what Robertson called "The Sympathy of Christ," which means that through Christ God can be touched.

¹³Robert B. Mellert, What is Process Theology? (New York: Paulist Press, 1975), 43.

Chapter 8

CONCLUSION

The purpose of the final chapter is threefold. First, it is to summarize the substance of the preceding discussion. Second, it is to lay out certain historical conclusions which arise from the study. Finally, it is to point out some specific suggestions in the form of concluding remarks that may provide the basis for future expression of the gospel.

One may assume from the start that what we have learned from the past is not irrelevant, but is on the contrary suggestive of the form that preaching might take. Furthermore, it may be argued that relevant preaching is not necessarily that which is decked out in modern dress. While it is true that a thorough acquaintance with contemporary modes of thought and feeling are essential for the communication of the gospel, still in all preaching has an old story to tell. The roots of Christian proclamation are buried in the ancient practice of offering people a framework of meaning by announcing who they are and where they are going by telling them whence they have come. This is one way of saying that substance is more important than style and, therefore, that preaching should not attempt to be an American success story (as seen, for example, in the preaching of Norman Vincent Peale et al.).

When one applies this insight to the topic of our discussion, one can easily see that the Resurrection of Christ may not be brought in at the last minute to blot out the pain of Jesus. Jesus really did suffer and die, and his pain and death have a lasting effect. The

Resurrection may not be used as a preacher's palliative, or as a kind of divine "instead of" which takes the place of the crucifixion. To argue that the Resurrection is merely a happy ending to a long and sad story, and thereby to imply that what came before is irrelevant, is to advocate a kind of "neo-docetism" which robs the gospel of its full humanity.

At the heart of the gospel is the Cross and Resurrection as what one might call a 'dipolar' representation of reality. Like alternating current, the bare essentials of preaching are concerned not only with victory, but defeat, not only with success, but disaster. Christian preaching must take human suffering seriously by taking the Cross seriously. At the same time, those who are called to preach must resist being overwhelmed by despair, by taking the Resurrection seriously. In the New Testament, the Cross and Resurrection are a way of offering hope to people who are drowning in despair. The resurrection of the dead is the New Testament's pledge of immortality as personal identity in a world which God will create in due time. New Testament hope is not optimism, however, but Christian realism. Hope knows the reality of pain and suffering, but in hope the future is wide open for God to declare the life-giving and healing word of the gospel of Christ. Preaching bears witness to the power of that word by testifying to the presence of the risen Lord in the life of the church. At the same time, preaching bears witness to the power of God by lifting up a vision of a world not yet complete. God's creative power is not restricted by what has gone on in the past. The future is truly open. God's last word has not been spoken. God may yet create 'a new heaven and a new earth.'

SUMMARY

Purpose and Method

The purpose of this dissertation quite simply has been to discover how the preaching of Paul in I Corinthians 15--on the Resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of the dead--was handled by five representatives of the history of preaching. The method of the inquiry is implied in the purpose. It has been to examine the extant sermons of the five representatives to see what they had to say concerning the meaning of the subject matter. Sermons are the data of the preaching experience. They reveal through form and content the presuppositions of the preacher and thereby reveal his interpretive mode. To a certain extent, then, it may be said that this paper has been an attempt to understand the history of Christian interpretation by analyzing how a particular theme was treated by various historical figures, who are known not only for their contributions to proclamation in particular but Christian thought in general. That is to say, one has been concerned to show how the orthodox position, which is the "mainstream" of Christian thought, has been upheld. In a limited sense, therefore, this dissertation may be seen as an apologia for or justification of traditional Christian preaching. I am convinced that relevant preaching is that which demonstrates a thorough acquaintance with its own history.

The Preaching of Chrysostom

For Chrysostom, as we have seen, the primary purpose of preaching was to reveal the love of God. He viewed the Crucifixion and Resurrection

as a unified act of divine power and love. He believed that the act of being raised from the dead was a greater sign of love than the prevention of death itself. Jesus, as the divine logos incarnate, was omnipotent and therefore had the power of God not only to lay down his own life but to raise himself from the grave. Chrysostom rejected the "gnostic" conclusion, however, that Jesus was human in appearance only, i.e., a phantasm who only appeared to die.

Concerning proofs of the Resurrection, first and foremost in the mind of our preacher was the encouragement and empowerment of the apostles by virtue of the spirit of the indwelling Christ. He challenged his contemporaries with this question. How could the apostles have overcome the world by convincing others of the truth of the Resurrection unless they were assisted by the very one they preached? This is a variation of the apologetic theme that the 'foolishness of the Cross' has supplanted the wisdom of Greek philosophy. Chrysostom argued that the human wisdom of the Greeks is against nature and that the folly of the apostles is according to nature. Reality as revealed in the Cross and Resurrection had set traditional wisdom on its head. The ignorant and the weak ones of the world had been given divine knowledge and power and had been exalted by the Cross and the promise of the Resurrection as immortality to come.

Chrysostom based his understanding of the resurrection of the dead on the ancient doctrine of creatio ex nihilo. He argued that if God, whose creative power fully resided in the human Jesus, could create something out of nothing--which was a premise none of his contemporaries would deny--then God could just as easily give life to a lifeless body.

Furthermore, Chrysostom argued that the earth itself, which demonstrates the power of God to bring life out of a lifeless thing, is a natural example of the truth of resurrection. God caused the 'lifeless and senseless' earth to put forth life, he said, 'in order that from the very first He might instruct you in the doctrine of resurrection.'

Not only was Chrysostom defending resurrection of the dead, he was defending a particular interpretation of it, the orthodox notion of resurrection of the flesh, which was equated with the human body. His opponents taught that the flesh is evil and corrupt and will deservedly decay in the ground. Furthermore, in line with the mood of the times, they believed that the body was a prison from which the immortal soul escaped at death. Chrysostom rejected this idea in favor of the biblical view, that there is a resurrection of the body. His mistake was to equate soma with its fleshly form. This was a misunderstanding of Paul, for whom soma was simply personal identity. When he spoke of resurrection of the body, Paul seemed to be suggesting belief in personal immortality in terms of survival of the same self, not resurrection of the sarx, which itself will be transformed. In any event, for Chrysostom, like the Resurrection of Christ the resurrection of the dead was also 'the very sum of all good things,' as far as hope in this life is concerned. If Christ's death and Resurrection freed the faithful from death itself, then together with Paul's assurance of the resurrection as personal identity beyond the grave, God favors those who remain faithful with the promise of immortality.

The Preaching of Bernard.

Bernard's preaching on the subject of the inquiry is complicated and not easily put in a few words. He held in essence that the Resurrection is perfection of love in the human soul. The risen Christ, he taught, dwells within the soul as a kind of life-giving spirit of divine charity. He viewed natural human existence as a life of sin and moral disease. Only Christ, he believed, can raise one who is dead in sin and transform one into a loving spirit.

Bernard believed in somatic life after death and, therefore, that there is no perfection outside the body. He argued that at the moment of death, which was classically defined as separation of the soul from the body, the soul will lie in sweet repose till the second coming of Christ. At that time the soul will be reunited with a new body of restored flesh. In this idea lay the definition of resurrection as final perfection in the teaching of Bernard, that the faithful will be raised 'in the likeness of the body of' Christ's glory. We can see, therefore, that Bernard viewed perfection as a process that begins with Christ's enlivening the soul which is trapped in a body of death and ends with consummation when the soul will enter an immortal body which is free of change and death. Bernard thought of resurrection as the reunification of the soul with a new and glorious body in the likeness of the risen body of Christ, which he understood in terms of the soma pneumatikon.

Furthermore, Bernard taught that the energizing spirit of the exalted Jesus, who comes in secret to revive the soul, allows one to live a life of loving service. He affirmed that the body is useful in

this regard, to serve and be served and, therefore, to act out the self-sacrifice of Jesus himself. His preaching aimed at reviving the human spirit by raising the soul out of its sinful condition and by assisting the faithful to love God and their neighbor and themselves for God's own sake. While this goal of perfect love was not realizable in this life, still it acted as a lure to fulfillment. Bernard taught that the highest degree of affection, which is love of God and neighbor and oneself for the sake of God alone, is not achievable this side of death and the resurrection of the dead. He said that 'the resurrection will bring consummation,' which meant that perfection must wait until transformation of the body. Resurrection as perfection will happen in the body, he believed, since the body is not a hindrance but an aid to salvation.

The Preaching of Luther.

Luther also believed that the Resurrection 'is the chief article of Christian doctrine.' He based not only belief in the resurrection of the dead but the whole of Christian doctrine on this article of faith. Indeed, he went so far as to say that denial of a single article of the Creed is tantamount to denial of the entire corpus of Christian preaching.

Luther's defense of the Creed, especially the article pertaining to death and life after death, was really a defense of his own preaching and apostolic authority. It is clear in the sermons that he identified closely with Paul et al. He came close to saying that he too received a divine revelation, which would be analogous to Paul's claim in Galatians 1.

Central to our understanding of Luther's defense of the Resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of the dead was Luther's view that these articles give meaning to life in the face of death. For Luther Resurrection meant life over death. He was more concerned with living joyfully and victoriously in the face of death than he was with death itself. That is to say, his sermons on the subject are not so much a Christian thanatology as they are a theodicy. They share this characteristic with apocalyptic literature in general.

By that light Luther's foremost affirmation was 'that my Lord Jesus lives and has risen so that he, in the end, might rescue me from sin, death, and hell.' One is impressed by this kind of faith, since it is indicative of the power of the gospel to elevate human beings above the terror of human existence. Each historical age has its terror, its fear of "things that go bump in the night." For Luther it was sin, death, Satan, and hell. For us it is annihilation by nuclear warfare. Whatever the form, the terror is real and delimiting of life in all its fullness. Belief in the Resurrection of Jesus, that he emerged victorious from the claws of death, and that he will give the victory to the faithful, overcomes the terror and offers the promise of new life in the face of death.

Furthermore, for Luther belief in the resurrection of the dead meant to ignore what the mind and the five senses say and to cling to this article in faith. To the human mind, as he acknowledged, when the body is put into the ground, that is the end of it. But the Word of God as revealed in the Resurrection of Christ belies what reason says is true. For Christ, Luther affirmed, has already begun to tear death to

shreds. Christ is already joined in battle with the age old enemies of the church, which he said were world, devil, flesh, sin, law, and death itself. Luther was certain of victory. He was certain that even death itself would be annihilated when the kingdom of God is perfected among the faithful.

Here Luther struggled with the problem of divine justice and love vis a vis the realities of evil and death. He affirmed that creation will be renewed and evil will be abolished at the coming of Christ to establish God's kingdom of holiness, righteousness and love. In his vindication of the moral attributes of God, which was based on the view that God's kingdom will eventually triumph over evil and death, he said that the resurrection begun in Baptism will then be made complete. Luther shared the conviction of Bernard, that resurrection represents final perfection of the faithful in the kingdom of God.

The Preaching of Wesley.

The theme of perfection, as is well known, was continued in the theology of John Wesley. Sanctification as perfection of the faithful in holiness and love by the indwelling spirit of the living Christ was the central motif in his preaching. For Wesley sanctification meant both freedom from sin in the present and resurrection as final perfection in the future. Perfection was both lure and fulfillment according to Wesley. It was the realization of divine love in the soul of the believer and the certainty of loving communion with God in the life to come.

From a consideration of this theme, it was a natural step for one to move to a discussion of Wesley's vindication of the holiness and the righteousness of God, given a world filled with moral and natural evil. He recognized that his view of perfection raised implicitly the question, if God is good and just and loving, why is there evil in the world? Or, to quote him directly, 'Why is there pain in the world . . .?' Wesley's answer was the traditional reply, that suffering and death are a consequence of the sin of Adam, who chose evil over good.

One may be saved from ultimate evil in the form of death, Wesley said, by Christ and the 'power of the resurrection.' For our preacher the power of Christ's Resurrection meant both the indwelling spirit of the risen Christ and the certainty of life after death in the form of resurrection, when God's righteous salvation will be made complete. He employed the Pauline category of what has been called the myth of the primal man, that in Adam all died in sin, and in Christ all will be made alive. That is to say, Wesley taught that the moral and natural dilemma of existence, which is characterized in part by sin and suffering, is overcome by the 'power of the resurrection.'

Wesley's response to this divine favor, which is symbolized by the Resurrection as a sign and seal of final salvation, was to preach the necessity of love of God and neighbor. As he was fond of repeating, 'We love because he first loved us.' His hope lay in the conviction that creation will finally be restored to its former greatness and glory. Paradise was lost when Adam sinned. It was Christ's purpose to restore creation to its former condition. Love is a sign that perfection is being carried out. When perfection is ultimately achieved, pain and death

will cease, and Paradise will be regained. In the meantime he urged the faithful to wait for Christ to return and transform all of creation, thereby creating a new heaven and a new earth. This in brief was Wesley's understanding of the Resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of the dead.

The Preaching of Robertson.

Robertson preached the resurrection of the dead as immortality in some form. Following Paul, he predicated belief in life after death on the Resurrection of Christ who serves as a prototype of immortality. Since the destiny of the human race is linked to the destiny of Christ, he argued, then the 'world-fact' of Christ's being raised from the dead is proof that the faithful will also be raised. Like Wesley, furthermore, Robertson speculated that there is an interim period of consciousness between death as separation of the soul from the body and resurrection as consummation. Bernard differed from this view in that for him the intermediate state was a kind of restful and dreamless sleep. In any event, as we have seen this point of view is one way of solving the problem of the dual legacy of preaching's Hebrew and Greek origins, namely, immortality of the soul vis a vis resurrection of the body.

For Robertson, as is true of all our subjects, the doctrine of sanctification was extremely important. He taught that God is perfecting the faithful in holiness and love by means of a life-giving spirit. Although traditionally it has been said that the Holy Spirit as a unique person of the Trinity is the sanctifying presence in the church, following the custom of the New Testament Robertson spoke of the spirit of the

indwelling Christ who robs death of its power by overcoming the moral and natural evils of fear and doubt, on the one hand, and pain and death on the other. This conviction in turn led Robertson to argue that the Christian life, which is characterized by inevitable progress from lower to higher forms of existence, is nothing less than a process of becoming like Christ. Resurrection as immortality in some form, he suggested, will be the realization of a Christ-like state, when the 'natural' is superseded by the 'spiritual.'

Robertson characterized the meaning of life, when viewed from the aspect of eternity, as perfection through suffering and victory through love. The heart of his preaching program was that the Cross symbolizes apparent defeat and the Resurrection represents real victory. The Resurrection in the thought of our preacher was what is really real, which meant the world of the spirit within or behind the world of nature. His view, therefore, was essentially the traditional metaphysical dualism of world and spirit, or mind and matter. That is why he was able to argue that life and death are illusory and that only eternity is real. This platonic notion does not detract from his contribution to the discussion, however, that within the believer is the risen Christ who is God's promise of life after death, a token of immortality in some form.

HISTORICAL CONCLUSIONS

This section addresses the question of what one may conclude concerning the value of the study for the ongoing task of Christian proclamation. In short, what have we learned from our study?

We have seen, first of all, that all of our historical figures preached at various times and in various places on the Resurrection. One may say in general terms that their homiletical method was apologetic in scope, as they attempted to respond to their various intellectual and cultural contexts. Their major task, like ours, was the hermeneutical problem of translating an ancient idea into contemporary modes of thought, a process which we see already in the New Testament with Paul's attempt to couch an essentially apocalyptic notion in terms which were comprehensible to and persuasive of the Greek mind.

One can reasonably conclude that each preacher saw as his task the defense of the orthodox position of the universal church which was affirmed historically, no matter what the context, the certainty that, to echo the Creed, Christ suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried, and was raised from the dead on the third day. In addition, each preacher felt constrained to defend the idea of resurrection of the dead, which early on was expressed in materialistic terms as resurrection of the flesh. This ancient doctrine, as we have seen, was a mistaken understanding of Paul, whose acquaintance with Greek thought led him to argue in terms of the transmogrification of the physical body (sarx) into a glorious 'pneumatical' reality which he called the soma pneumatikon. Moreover, Paul's doctrine of resurrection meant the survival of the same self, not restoration of one's physical being. Of the preachers who were studied, only Wesley and Robertson seemed to recognize the essential difference between resurrection into a spiritual body and resurrection of the flesh. The former notion is more closely related to Greek thought, the latter to Hebraic

materialistic ideas concerning the restoration of the dead--indeed of all creation--to their former physical selves. In any event, it seems clear that everyone affirmed that resurrection means survival as personal identity in some mode of "heavenly" existence following physical disintegration and death. That is to say, each one argued for resurrection from the dead into life eternal in some kind of recognizable form.

Another notion which arises out of the discussion pertains to the problem of Greek and Hebrew thought. We have seen how the ideas of Plato via gnosticism and Neoplatonism were absorbed into the stream of historical consciousness of Christian theology and proclamation. At the risk of oversimplification, and with notable exceptions in the New Testament view (cf. Luke 23:43), one may say that resurrection in the generic sense is a biblical idea whose thrust is essentially eschatological, meaning that it will happen at the end of history when God is moved to renew creation and all its inhabitants. This doctrine is most clearly outlined and reinterpreted by the Apostle Paul in light of the Resurrection of Christ. As long as theology dwelled in the hills of Judea, there was no real problem for interpretation, with the possible exception of the skepticism of the Sadducees. But no sooner had the church taken its kerygma into the wider Greco-Roman world and attempted to persuade the gentiles of the truth of its essential message, that Christ died and was buried and was raised from the dead, than a serious hermeneutical problem arose. We can hear echoes of that problem in the response of certain Greek philosophers to Paul on the Areopagus in Athens (Acts 17:16ff.). Apparently they thought that Paul was preaching a pair of 'divinities' ("daemons"), "Jesus" and "Anastasis"--'because he preached

Jesus and the resurrection.' This story, whether historical or not, is an excellent example of the hermeneutical problem that the first preachers to the gentiles must have faced.

The history of preaching the Resurrection in the Greco-Roman world is sketchy and complex, but in essence one might say that in the process the kerygma took on Greek metaphysics, partly to its credit and partly to its loss. What the kerygma gained was a critical intellectual apparatus in the form of platonic ideas which allowed it to be understood by a world whose intellect originated in the halls of ancient Athens. As we now recognize, the idea of the immortality of the soul is a product of the fertile mind of Plato (and his "school"), who may have learned it from his teacher Socrates (cf. the Phaedo). What the kerygma lost was its essentially Hebraic character. The method of Christian theology was to combine the eschatology of Jew and Greek into a synthesis which left an existing tension throughout the history of preaching the Resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of the dead. As we have seen, some of our preachers attempted to solve this problem by postulating a view of death and immortality which preserved the central notions of both Greek and Hebrew thought. One may recall, e.g., that Wesley preached that at death, which he defined platonically as the separation of the soul from the body, the soul flies immediately to an 'antechamber of heaven' where it awaits perfection as consummation at the moment of resurrection. This is one way of lessening the tension which is a result of preaching's Greek and Hebrew roots. Let it be said, however, that the notions of resurrection of the dead and immortality of the soul have always remained in uneasy coexistence.

The third historical conclusion may be expressed in terms of what use homiletically speaking has been made of the kerygma of Resurrection. Before we attempt to answer that question, it may be well to recall the shift in eschatological thought which was alluded to above in our discussion of the historical background encompassing the primitive church to the Middle Ages. What seems to have happened is that as the years went by the makers of early Christian thought began to take time more seriously in terms of the church as a historical phenomenon. In the New Testament this may be seen as the problem which the delay of the Parousia raised for Christian reflection on the meaning of time and eternity. It is clear that the Endtime was gradually pushed back farther and farther to make room for the more pressing matters of ecclesiastical organization and the ethical behavior of those who felt trapped by an essentially alien culture from which they were trying to escape. During the era of persecution, especially in the second and third centuries, one may observe a renewed interest in eschatology with a concomitant emphasis on strict ethical behavior. But by the fourth century it is clear that Christianity finally recognized its essential historicity, and ecclesiastical organization was made complete. The legacy of the early church remained, however. This implies that a tension was felt between the church as an eschatological or "ahistorical" community and the church which inhabits the finite realm. Augustine attempted to synthesize these ideas with his view of the church as a historical albeit inferior reality on earth (consisting of both saints and sinners), which one may think of as the empirical church, and the true church in heaven. Metaphysical dualism was again in evidence.

Our review of preaching the Resurrection has shown that the preachers studied recognized the tension which exists between eschatology and history, although they may not have expressed it in those terms. What they did do was to speak of resurrection generally as a presently realizable state of existence, i.e., as a historical reality, and also as a future reality, at which time Christ will return to raise the dead and translate the living. Preaching on the resurrection in history has meant the possibility of a life in faith here and now and a life in Christ to come, with these ideas predicated on the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Our preachers consistently preached the new life which is yet to be as a presently realizable albeit imperfect reality in the ongoing life of the community of faith as a historical community of saving grace and divine love which are mediated through Word and Sacrament.

Finally, there is the whole question of evil in the form of suffering and death vis a vis the existence of a good and just and loving God. Without question it was recognized that suffering and death challenge the biblical picture of God's moral attributes. It would be redundant to review in detail the arguments that our preachers advanced to deal with this issue. One may say, however, that whenever the question of pain and death was raised, the answer was to point to the suffering and death of Jesus and his decisive victory over death by emerging from the grave unharmed. In like manner, whenever the question of the meaning of life in the face of such a plenitude of evil cropped up, the response was that since Jesus died and is alive, those who align themselves with him in sacred fellowship and love need no longer fear death

and dying. Life, they said, can be lived fully and joyfully in the certain knowledge of life after death.

But we must recognize today the radical change in worldview. We live in an entirely different cultural context in which it is no longer safe to assume that the world begins with the possibility of life after death. Indeed, our materialistic mind-set, which is predicated on four hundred years of modern science, from Newton to Einstein, strictly prohibits the view that death is anything more than the destruction of consciousness when the functions of mind cease to exist with the death of the brain. Is this a new problem? Doubt concerning the Resurrection of Christ and life after death has been the phantom which has haunted the Christian faith since the days of the apostles. And still the faith that Jesus is alive goes on. This affirmation may be expressed in several ways, but the most convincing means of expression may be that Jesus is alive in the ongoing life of the community of faith. The church is, if it is anything, a community of the Resurrection and thus is a symbol of hope in the midst of demonic forces which threaten to destroy the dignity and meaning of human life. Let us be blunt here. Death without the pledge of immortality as eternal life with God both here and beyond the grave annihilates meaning and is an affront to reason. It is not reasonable to assert dogmatically under the guise of the critical scientific worldview that this life is all there is to reality. This claim to "objective" knowledge leaves us with an absurd world and the mistaken idea of an unjust, unrighteous, unloving and therefore impotent God who cannot effect salvation. But there is more than one way of knowing. Faith is a certain knowledge of a loving God who preserves

what is good and transforms what is evil by absorbing it into the plenitude of his Being. Faith is the knowledge that God cares for creation and will do everything in his power to save it by gently and patiently luring it to fulfillment.

FINAL THOUGHTS

We come now to the end of our study. It is the purpose of this brief section to submit some concluding comments for the sake of final reflection. These thoughts are not offered as dogmatic propositions, but as suggestions which seem to be implied by those who have preached on the reality of the gospel of the Resurrection and life after death.

First and foremost is the idea that the Resurrection and belief in life after death in recognizable form are jointly an ideal manifestation of the eternal love of God in whom there is no loss. Here the problem of meaning in the face of death is addressed and at least partially solved. God works 'among the fragments and mouldering wreck of our humanity,' to echo Robertson, and tenderly and patiently lures creation to fulfillment.

Preaching whose standpoint is eternity must take the idea of final perfection seriously. The problem again is loss and decay which are symbolized by death. Perfection as a lure to fulfillment in love is suggestive of the persuasive love of God who will have the final word despite appearances to the contrary. One is reminded again of Robertson's insight pertaining to the 'soul of goodness in things evil.'

Preaching on the Resurrection may exist in the hope that this life is not all there is to reality. By the gospel we are assured of

personal immortality as life after death in some form. Our preachers all took the human body seriously, so seriously that they could not imagine life, even life after death, outside the body. While at times the views they took seem overly materialistic, especially the doctrine of 'resurrection of the flesh,' what seems to be implied in Paul's conception of resurrection of the body is survival of the same self. Resurrection as immortality in some form means personal identity in life after death.¹

The assurance of personal survival in turn may instill in us the quality of detachment in the face of evil. This idea is not offered to justify callousness in the face of human suffering, nor to escape the reality of evil by denying its existence. On the contrary, it is clear that, from the standpoint of eternity, what we are in this life is of everlasting consequence and meaning. Simply stated, one might say that detachment is a quality which allows one to face suffering, loss, and death without falling prey to cynicism and despair which might result in one's adopting the carpe diem ethic of 'eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die.' Detachment as a way of handling reality is grounded in the assurance that God is at work within the wreckage of the world, tenderly and patiently luring the world to fulfillment.

Preaching on the Resurrection, of course, implies belief in the Resurrection as the meaning of ultimate reality. This means that when

¹ A modern defense of the possibility of resurrection of the body as personal identity, couched in terms of what he calls "eschatological verification," may be seen in John Hick, "Theology and Verification," in Basil Mitchell (ed.) The Philosophy of Religion (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 53-71.

the Resurrection is proclaimed, the purpose of that proclamation is to awaken faith in the crucified and risen One of God. In other words, the language of Resurrection is spoken in order to inspire faith in Christ. The Resurrection as a phenomenon alongside or even within history is not capable of saving anyone. Instead, it is faith that saves or it does nothing at all. Faith is not merely satisfaction about a "fact of history," but it is trust in the person of Christ and the certainty that in Christ God has accomplished what is necessary to assure us of final victory.

Ultimate victory in faith seems assured by the intuition that God is leading the world toward final consummation or satisfaction in terms of what Whitehead called 'the Apotheosis of the World.' This vision of completion, which seems suggestive of perfect unity and everlasting communion with God, should not be neglected lest we have no hope in the future and are consequently running the race in vain.

Let me conclude with this thought. Someone once said that from time to time we need to be reminded that we are not God. To me this means that one must not attempt to confine God by one's own limited understanding of ultimate reality. That is to say, the fact that I do not fully understand the omnipotence of God is no reason to doubt that the divine love--simply because it is eternal--is undiminished with the passage of time. In the end, then, preaching on the Resurrection and the promise of life after death must let God be God and humankind be humankind, with the hope that at the end of the day we shall be united forever in love. Finis.

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